Exploring Collaborative Support Strategies for Youth on Probation in a Project Based Learning School: A Qualitative Case Study

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Stephanie Renee Speech

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Exploring Collaborative Support Strategies for Youth on Probation in a Project Based Learning School: A Qualitative Case Study

Stephanie Renee Speech

Committee:

_____
Kathy D. Geller, Ph.D.

_____
W. Edward Bureau, Ph.D.

_____
Ernest Brown, Ph.D.

_____
Date

Dedication

To my wonderful three daughters, Sydney, Kendall, and Kyla:
I hope one day this dissertation will make you all proud.

In memory of my father Abraham Speech, Sr.:
I know you are looking down from heaven smiling and proud of your daughter saying,
"Stephanie, you can do anything if you put your mind to it!"

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No one knows, but my heavenly father above, my journey to completing this dissertation. From the passing of my father to the birth of my twin girls, I still persevered. To him, I give thanks for giving me the mind, guidance, and strength to persevere.

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Abstract

Exploring Collaborative Support Strategies for Youth on Probation in a Project Based Learning School: A Qualitative Case Study

Stephanie Renee Speech, Ed.D.

Drexel University, June 2015

Chairperson: Kathy D. Geller

While there is much discussion in the existing research on the support services, teaching methods, and academic models for youth offenders detained in a secure facility, there is minimal information on alternative learning models currently being used at school sites for youth offenders who have returned to the community on juvenile probation after detention. The purpose of this study was to explore how collaborative systems in a project based learning school using Big Picture Learning Model (BPLM) address the academic struggles of youth on probation and to understand the value of collaboration for enhancing the student's learning experience. In this case study, the researcher sought to understand how collaborative team members from multiple systems can best support the engagement of juvenile offenders on probation in a project based learning school setting.

Ten participants from the BPLM School who were employed by a range of organizations, including a unified school district, the county's juvenile probation and public health departments, non-profit organizations, and local community agencies were interviewed. Through an in-depth analysis of interviews, observations, and artifacts, four themes emerged: (a) unique learning experience, (b) complications applying BPLM, (c) commonality of staff qualities, and (d) working together as a team. The themes informed the study's four findings that (a) individualized learning plans are based on the students' needs and are essential to encourage student engagement, (b) trust is also gained between the staff and students when a strong relationship or bond is established, (c) professional development is required for staff to ensure knowledge and understanding of instructional methods with the aim to afford all students an enriching BPLM learning experiences, and (d) trust is an essential ingredient for staff to communicate and collaborate about the students' needs to provide effective interventions for youth. Recommendations include establishing required training for all staff, outlining expectations for the collaborations, and stability of leadership and structure and suggestions for further research.

Keywords: big picture learning model, collaborative, juvenile probation, multiple systems project based learning, student engagement, youth offender previous crime"

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Introduction to the Problem

Researchers and scholars have acknowledged that there is a relationship between youth's low academic performance and their delinquent behavior (Brown, Riley, Walwarth, Leaf, & Valdez, 2008; Maguin & Loeber, 1996; Zhang et al., 2010). Many youth offenders involved in the juvenile justice system have a history of academic underachievement, poor school attendance, and disciplinary problems (Wang, Blomberg, & Li, 2005). According to Leone and Weinberg (2010), youth involved in the juvenile justice system "are less likely to achieve education milestones, earn diplomas and experience the health and well-being associated with higher income and stable employment as adult" (p. 5). Today, the juvenile justice system is faced with addressing the educational needs of youth offenders in an effort to prevent future delinquency.

The juvenile justice system in the United States was created to provide rehabilitative and preventive services for youths in order to deter delinquent behavior. The first juvenile court in the United States, established in Illinois in 1899, was developed with the goal to provide separate facilities to promote rehabilitation and prevention rather than punish youths (McCord, Widom, & Crowell, 2001). In the 1980s, when the juvenile crime rate was increasingly higher than that of previous years, the juvenile courts responded with tougher and more punitive disciplinary actions. Subsequently, those harsher punishments were determined to influence a higher risk of potential criminal activity and be ineffective in the rehabilitation and prevention of delinquent behavior (Mears, Schollenberger, Willison, Owens, & Butts, 2010).

Maguin and Loeber (1996) suggested that an important predictor of recidivism and delinquency is youth's academic performance. Delinquent youth not only display academic deficiencies in the area of math, reading, spelling and writing, but many exhibit cognitive functioning deficits (e.g., low IQ, hyperactivity, or impulse control) (Grigorenko, 2006). Many juvenile justice and education systems have begun joining together in an effort to develop programs and strategies to support the student population of youth offenders (Hellriegel & Yates, 1999; Mazzotti & Higgins, 2006). Furthermore, educators continue to seek new learning methods in attempts to improve the academic experience of youth offenders (Jacobi, 2008; King, Silvey, Holliday, & Johnston, 1998; Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010).

In response to this need, there are various educational systems across the country that are applying alternative education programs and teaching strategies in an attempt to provide a more positive learning environment for students struggling academically in order to increase academic success at school (Hellriegel & Yates, 1999; Levine, 2002; Mazzotti & Higgins, 2006). Youth on probation are one specific group of students that are struggling academically. Traditional schooling has not met their needs, and the belief is that they may benefit from an alternative educational program or learning model that responds to their educational, mental health, and substance abuse needs. This requires a school setting that will improve literacy, increase high school graduation rates, and encourage and increase college enrollment or employment at completion (Leone & Weinberg, 2010).

Statement of the Problem to Be Researched

While there is much discussion in the existing research on the support services, teaching methods, and academic models for youth offenders detained in a secure facility, there is minimal information on alternative learning models currently being used at school sites for youth offenders who have returned to the community on juvenile probation after detention.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore how collaborative systems in a project based learning school (PBL) address the academic struggles of youth on probation. It was also to seek understanding of the value of collaboration for enhancing the student's learning experience. Focusing on a metropolitan high school in California that has embraced a project based learning approach for this population, and drawing on the perspectives of the administration, teachers, and staff from the involved agencies, this case study sought to understand how collaborative systems support juvenile offenders on probation.

Gonsoulin and Read (2011) suggested that to improve educational outcomes, "interagency communications and collaboration is a key principle and practice in addressing the unmet educational needs of youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems" (p. 10). Efforts on the federal level (e.g., The Federal Shared Youth Vision Partnership Grant awarded to16 states), state level (e.g., The Iowa Collaborative for Youth Development), and county level (e.g., Annie E. Casey Foundation-to-Family Initiative implemented in six counties in California) are supporting the implementation of collaborative initiatives within a multisystem partnership to improve academic outcomes

(Leone & Weinberg, 2010). These multisystem and interagency collaborative initiatives are formed to bring key support services together with the hope of preventing additional delinquency (Leone & Weinberg, 2010).

At the county level, a California Unified School District (USD) opened a metropolitan high school to address the youth offender population's poor academic progress. The district established a site, identified a project based learning pedagogy, and brought together a collaborative team with multiple partners – the juvenile superior court, the juvenile probation department, the local city's department of public health, and other community agency partners – with a goal to better meet the educational needs of youth offenders on probation. The metropolitan high school in this school district was the first high school in the State of California with this unique partnership. The collaborative partners are on site and support the school faculty and administration's efforts to work with the youth offender population. The school selected a specific learning curriculum – the Big Picture Learning Model (BPLM) – that incorporates a PBL component as an alternative learning strategy to engage youth on probation who have previously struggled academically. The PBL component of the BPLM involves the students learning through hands-on internship experiences. This project based approach centers on three principles: (a) a personalized learning plan based on the individualized interest and goals of each student; (b) learning through internships in which students participate in real work in the real world connected to their personalized learning plan; and (c) a student's progress not begin measured through grades or tests, but through narratives and exhibitions based on the quality of the individual's work (Littky & Grabelle, 2004**)**.

Research Questions

To understand how the collaborative team members from multiple systems support the engagement of youth offenders on probation in a project based school setting, this researcher sought to answer:

- How do team members from a project based learning school (PBL) describe the practice and pedagogy in place to support youth on probation who are court ordered to attend?
- How do the various team members portray their collaborative role in support of the students on probation?
- What successes and challenges are identified by the team members related to the alternative PBL model at the school site?

The Conceptual Framework

Researcher Stances and Experiential Base

My stance as a researcher includes an ontological approach. According to Creswell (2007), when an ontological approach is taken, "the researcher uses quotes and themes in words of participants and provides evidence of different perspectives" (p. 17). As a researcher, I learned first-hand from the subjects in the study. Learning about PBL and the collaborative approach from the various group members' points of view is essential to understanding the perceived effect that this learning model has on youth offenders who may have a range of mental health, criminal, and academic problems.

My worldview and approach to this research was based on a social constructivist perspective: "in this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). I have worked in the juvenile justice field

for over 15 years and have an interest in seeking ways to address the lack of interest and motivation youth offenders have in the education system. Gergen (1985) stated that a "social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the process by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (p. 266). He further stated that this process of understanding the world emanates from the natural influences surrounding us, and also comes from the "active, cooperation enterprise of persons in relationships" (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). Inquiring about the specific PBL educational learning model and the collective efforts of the multiple agencies at the high school site through structured dialogue and interactions with the collaborative team members may provide the background and framework for better understanding the impact of this partnership when supporting youth on probation in this educational setting. In this case study research, a subjective meaning was formed through the worldview and personal experiences of the collaborative team members.

Conceptual Framework

Three areas of theory, research, and practice formed the conceptual framework and established a foundation for exploring this phenomenon. The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates these three literature streams that relate to (a) the youth offender profile, (b) project based learning, and (c) collaboration between multiple systems**.**

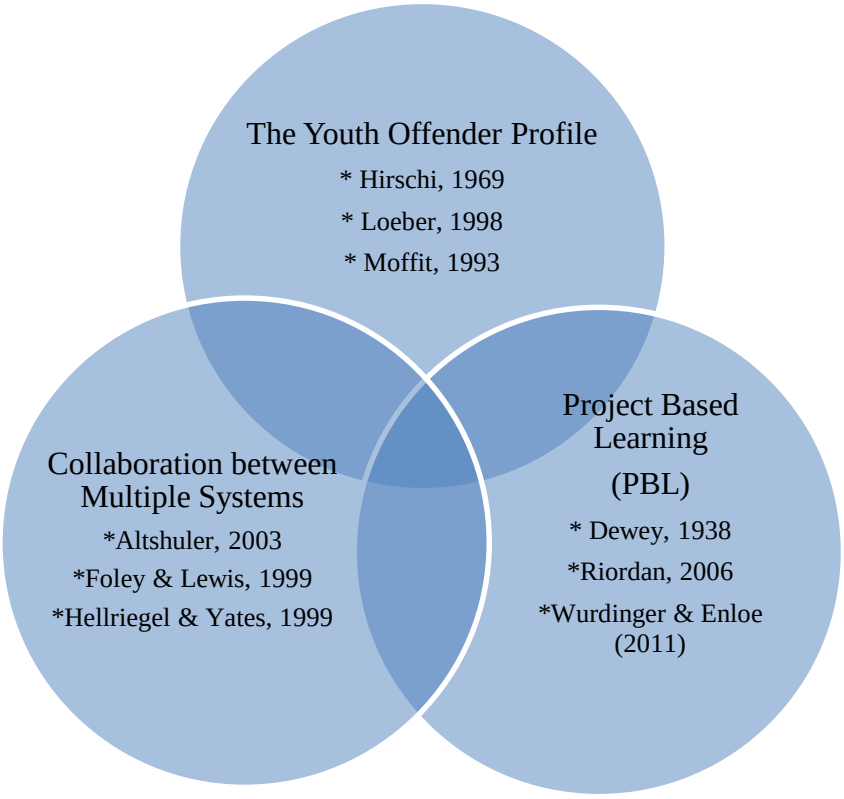

Figure 1. Diagram of research streams.

The youth offender profile. Identifying the behavioral characteristics commonly associated with a youth offender is significant when distinguishing the profile of the youth offender from non-offending youth. These characteristics described by mental health specialists, psychologists, and criminologists include various antisocial, conduct disorders and delinquent and criminal behaviors that begin long before the youth's first contact with the police and are likely present as soon as early childhood (Moffit, 1993). Hirschi (1969), in his theory on social control of juvenile delinquency, proposed that when a youth's connection to society is detached, delinquent behavior occurs. Loeber (1990) noted antisocial and delinquent behaviors may be linked to poor impulse control and that personality and environmental elements present high risk factors linked to the

antisocial and delinquent behavior. These risk factors and behaviors identify issues that need to be addressed to create the appropriate intervention services both within the school setting and outside.

Project based learning. Project based learning (PBL) is a student-centered learning approach that allows the student to have the freedom, independence, and responsibility for what is learned (Lam, Cheng, & Ma, 2009; Spronken-Smith & Harland, 2009). It connects students' personal interests and learned knowledge to real-life learning experiences (David, 2008; Littky & Grabelle, 2004; Wolk, 1994). PBL dates back as early as 1900 to philosopher and educator, John Dewey who advocated for students to actively learn through hands-on experience (Dewey, 1990). Advocates for PBL assert that it enhances critical thinking and life skills more effectively than traditional school teaching methods (Hernandez-Ramos & De La Paz, 2010; Lam et al., 2009; Tanner, 2012; Wurdinger & Enloe, 2011). In PBL, the role of a teacher is more as a facilitator rather than instructor (Lam et al., 2009). The teacher encourages the students to be engaged in the learning setting as opposed to sitting at a desk and taking notes based on lectures (Spronken-Smith & Harland, 2009). Reviewing the literature on PBL helped clarify how existing research supports that this learning model is appropriate for engaging the disconnected juvenile offender. The BPLM design, one type of PBL, was the basis for teaching pedagogy at the metropolitan High School in California research site.

Collaboration between multiple systems. Collaboration between professionals within the education and juvenile justice systems is essential when working together to support the youth offender on probation who is struggling academically (Foley & Lewis,

1999). There are various barriers present that historically have prevented multiple systems and interagency collaboration from successfully occurring. Altshuler (2003) identified that mistrust of each system's separate goal or plan is one key factor. Other research identified that all parties must be willing participants and share equal responsibility and common goals (Mears et al., 2010; Vaccaro, 2008).

When professionals working with youth are divided on their viewpoints, the delivery of service approaches becomes problematic in that it gives mixed messages regarding the goals and objectives (Hinton, Sims, Adams, & West, 2007). In a multisystem collaboration, the appropriate stakeholders must be included in the alliance, transparent roles and responsibilities must be defined, and a designated agency needs to lead the coordination of the partnership (Dickerson, 2003). The literature explains the importance of collaboration and sharing information among multiple systems and service providers and how imperative this role is for youth to benefit from the collective effort of all professionals working together in the best interest of them and their problematic issues (Hellriegel & Yates, 1999; Mullis et al., 2005).

By exploring the theory, research, and practice on (a) the profile of the youth offender and (b) PBL, and c) the collaboration of the education and juvenile justice systems, this research sought to offer an understanding of what is essential to the exploration of supporting the youth offenders on probation in this specific education setting (PBL). The literature provided a foundation for understanding how the youthful offender student on probation may benefit from the actions of the educational and juvenile justice systems working together collectively to implement a project-based learning strategy for this population.

Definition of Terms

Advisor

The designated teacher who oversees a group of 13 to 14 students learning throughout their high school years at a Big Picture School (Levine, 2002)

Antisocial behavior

Disruptive or rebellious conduct or actions viewed as "serious acts, such as deliberate thefts, vandalism, and physical aggression" (Loeber, 1990, p. 5)

Big Picture Learning Model

A project based learning alternative education model that personalizes a student's academic learning interest through real-life experiences (Littky & Grabelle, 2004)

Delinquency

For the purpose of this study, delinquency is defined as the criminal behavior or act by a youth offender.

Delinquent act

According to Loeber (1990), "delinquent acts are a subset of antisocial behaviors inwhich the behavior violates criminal laws" (p. 5).

Detention

A youth that has violated a law and is incarcerated at a juvenile facility (Martin, Martin, Dell, Davis, & Guerrieri, 2008)

Disruptive behavior

Emotional behavior that is negative and often persistent, "such as a difficult temperament in babies, chronic oppositional behavior, and temper tantrums" (Loeber, 1990, p. 5)

Multisystem collaboration

Several systems (e.g., educational, juvenile courts, and mental health) joining together for a common cause or interest. For example, a school district, department of mental health, and the juvenile and family courts partnering together to ensure the well-being of youth involved in all three systems (Leone & Weinberg, 2009).

Project based learning

A teaching and learning strategy that uses a student-centered approach, which gives a student autonomy to personalize his or her learning through real-life hand-on projects (Smith, 2010)

Recidivism

An individual continuing criminal involvement after convicted "person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after receiving sanctions or undergoing intervention for a previous crime" (National Institute of Justice, 2010, para. 1)

Youth offender

An individual under the age of 18 who has engaged in criminal activity (Martin et al., 2008).

Assumptions and Limitations

Regardless of the PBL and the additional support services offered through a multisystem collaboration, one assumption was a youth offender on probation court ordered to attend the metropolitan high school will not engage in school. Many of these youth are not motivated to attend school and have a lack of interest due to their academic struggles in basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills. It does not matter what

school setting the youths are placed in, if they lack basic reading and math skills, they will not attend school and will continue to struggle in their academics.

This assumption comes from the work experiences of this researcher. However, the researcher looks forward to exploring and seeking, through the voices of the various team members, school artifacts, and site observations, how these youths are being encouraged to engage in this alternative learning model and how these team members work together to support the students in this academic setting. By applying a social constructivist view and looking at the school setting through the worldview and personal experiences of the collaborative team members, the researcher bracketed her assumption seeking to allow the data to inform the research (and her own worldview).

One limitation to this study was that this research focused on the collaborative partners' perceptions and did not bring in the actual voices and views of the youth offenders and their parents. A second limitation to recognize is that by studying this one site, the findings may only be applicable to this school location and may not generalizable to other school sites.

Summary

When it comes to addressing the youth offender's educational needs while involved in the juvenile justice system, the court and educators are seeking effective teaching models that engage them. Although teaching and learning methods have been reviewed for youth offenders detained in a secure facility, there is limited information on models used with non-detained youth offenders. This research explored the current PBL alternative method used at a metropolitan high school that serves probationary youth from the perspectives of the collaborative staff. The collaborative staff included

representatives from the community, the court system, mental health, and the school district.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction to Chapter 2

Three areas of theory, research, and practice were explored and established the basis for understanding what is essential for engaging and supporting the youth offender on juvenile probation in a specific educational setting. The conceptual framework for this study included a review of research on the youth offender profile, PBL, and multisystem collaboration. The literature review provides a foundation for understanding how the youth offender on juvenile probation student may benefit from the actions of the educational and juvenile justice systems in collaboration with community agencies to encourage learning in an alternative educational setting through the use of a project based learning strategy.

Literature Review

The Youth Offender Profile

Researchers have identified environmental factors that contribute to the delinquent behavior of youth including: a dysfunctional home; poverty; parental neglect; physical abuse; exposure to criminal activities from family members, peers, or the neighborhood; parental addiction to controlled substances; associating with negative peers; and failing in school (Grigorenko, 2006; Mallett, 2010; Mullis et al., 2005; Neely-Barnes & Whitted, 2011). These environmental factors, in turn, impact the behaviors of youth and may be evidenced in behavioral characteristics that may include: depression, substance abuse, aggressiveness, emotional disabilities, conduct disorders, and educationally related disabilities (Mallett, 2010; Mulder, Brand, Bullens, & van Marle,

2011). Recognizing the characteristics that inform the profile of the youth offender is essential to understanding how these behaviors may be reflected in their academic struggles and to ensure that appropriate intervention services are available to support them.

Hirschi's (1969) original research examined the causes of delinquency. In a 1964 quantitative study of 17,500 students in 11 public junior and senior high schools in Contra Costa County in northern California, Hirschi (1969) concluded, "delinquency is not caused by beliefs that require delinquency but is rather made possible by the absence of (effective) beliefs that forbid delinquency" (p. 198). He suggested that individuals commit delinquent acts when their bond or connection to people or society is weak or broken. Based on his research, Mallet (2010) concluded that the same environmental factors affecting youth offenders identified decades ago are still prevalent today.

Hirschi (1969) identified four elements that influence delinquency due to the lack of a bond or connection: (a) attachment (parents, school, and peers), (b) commitment to conventional actions (educational, occupational, and passage to adult status), (c) involvement in conventional activities (i.e., sports, recreational activities, employment), and (d) beliefs (values about the law and legal system and social norms). He concluded that, "the stronger the attachment, the less likely the child is to be delinquent" (Hirschi, 1969, p. 229). That is, the stronger the bond the youth has to a positive parent, peer, or school experience, the less likely he or she will stray toward delinquency.

Daley and Onwuegbuzie (2001) similarly suggested that a youth exposed to criminal activity by a sibling, parent, or friend or introduced to drugs and alcohol at an early age identifies with behaviors that do not forbid delinquency. Daley and

Onwuegbuzie (2001) examined the characteristics of 82 male youth offenders between the ages of 12 and 18 and who became involved in the juvenile justice system in a large southeastern state. Their research identified a range of environmental factors and behaviors that characterized these male youth offenders: having special educational needs, coming from families who earned less than $10,000 annually, living in single-parent homes (more than half being their natural mother), experiencing a father is who absent from the family, having parents or siblings with criminal records, being repeat offenders, becoming involved with drugs starting at a very young age, and having a low interest in school.

Moffit (1993) further studied delinquent behavior and described two categories of antisocial youth offenders: adolescence-limited offenders and life-course-persistent offenders. The adolescence-limited offender is labeled as only offending during the adolescent age and typically engages in delinquent behavior that involves status offenses. These status offenses may involve crimes that display behaviors beyond parental control (e.g., loitering, running away from home, or theft) or crimes that would not necessarily be an offense if the youth were the legal adult age (e.g., illegal use of alcohol or cigarettes). He then described the life-course persistent offender as exhibiting antisocial behavior beginning in early childhood and continuing through the adolescent years into adulthood. Life-course offenders' crimes characteristically involve more serious and violent crimes against victims, which include assault and fraud. Moffit (1993) asserted that the adolescence-limited offender antisocial behavior is learned conduct from peers typically at the adolescent age, whereas life-course persistent offenders' antisocial behavior is learned during childhood from the environment in which criminal behavior is visible.

Loeber (1990) suggested that one distinct characteristic of antisocial behavior is the lack of impulse control. He stated, "impulsive children have little ability to draw from past experiences to anticipate future consequences" (Loeber, 1990, p. 2). Similar to Moffit (1993), Loeber (1990) stated that antisocial behavior in children "can lead to children's victimizing others through violence or theft" (p. 2). Loeber (1990) reported that not all antisocial behavior and delinquent acts involve physical harm or loss of property, but can be nonviolent behavior such as truancy or the use of illegal drugs. The behaviors are both biological (e.g., neurological development) and social (e.g., poor supervision, parent and peer involvement in criminal activity) and can have an influence on delinquency (Loeber, 1990). Loeber (1990) asserted that having knowledge of these behaviors that are prevalent during the developmental years will have a greater influence on determining both the prevention and intervention services needed to address the antisocial behavior.

Venezia (2000) agreed with Loeber's (1990) contention that not all antisocial behavior and delinquent acts involve physical harm or loss of property, but may also include nonviolent behavior such as truancy or the use of illegal drugs. Venezia (2000) explored the profiles of a sample of 800 aggressive and non-aggressive youth offenders between the ages of 10 and 18 from the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department in the state of Texas. These youth offenders were charged with an offense or offenses and were referred by the court for a psychological evaluation (Venezia, 2000). According to Venezia (2000), aggressive offenders were more likely to have poor impulse control, mood disorders, and special educational needs in school. However, aggressive offenders

"were less likely than nonaggressive offenders to sell drugs, use drugs, or to have a substance-related diagnosis" (Venezia, 2000, p. 64).

Johnson (2007) studied the social characteristics and beliefs of delinquent and non-delinquent youth in a quantitative study with a sample population of 195 students from public schools within the Elmore County School District in the state of Alabama and the Alabama Department of Youth Services facility. Johnson (2007) used the self-reported Youth Self-Assessment of Social Characteristics and Beliefs instrument to assess characteristics in delinquent and non-delinquent youth. Additional open-ended questions were administered only to the youth from the Alabama Department of Youth Services facility (Johnson, 2007). Johnson's (2007) findings indicated distinct differences between delinquent and non-delinquent youth; the most significant difference between the two groups was that "non-delinquents were more likely to follow rules and control their temper than delinquents" (p. 105). Johnson's finding with regard to delinquents' difficulties with anger management coincides with Loeber's theory of delinquent youth having poor impulse control.

Aiello (2007) gathered data accrued from the Texas Youth Commission on female offenders incarcerated by the state and conducted an exploratory descriptive analysis of the characteristics of 822 female youth between the ages of 11 and 18 who were active in the juvenile justice system. Similar to Daley and Onwuegbuzie's (2001) research findings of male offenders' educational struggles, Aiello's (2007) findings suggest that female adolescents in the correction center struggled academically "with their reading and math achievement levels lagging about five years behind those of their age groups" (p. 114). The female population "typically reached an education level of eighth grade or

less before becoming incarcerated" (Aiello, 2007, p. 112). In addition, there was a significant correlation represented between academics, behavior, and emotional functioning characteristics in female offenders displaying, "moderate mental health symptoms and/or moderate difficulty in social, occupational, or school functioning" (p. 114).

Mullis et al. (2005) conducted a case study examining the developmental, background, and intervention characteristics of 1,389 young chronic offenders in a southeastern state finding that behavioral problems are often present early both at school and at home. For the purposes of their study, chronic offenders were defined as

> youth ages 11 and younger who had committed 10 offenses and had been arrested for these offenses in a 12-month period or youth ages 12 to 15 who had committed 15 offenses and had been arrested for these offenses in an 18-month period. (Mullis et al., 2005, p. 135)

They noted, "some early indications of problems in school included disruptive behavior in the classroom, refusing to do homework, apathy toward school and most frequently truancy (e.g., absence from school on regularly scheduled school days)" (p. 142). In addition, "home-related behaviors included disobedience to parental authority, talking back, and fighting with siblings" (Mullis et al., 2005, p. 142). Mullis et al. (2005) found that some caregivers attributed their child's delinquent behavior to acting out in response to problems that were present in the home, noting that the acting out would usually take place soon after some form of physical, mental, or sexual abuse. Many of these behavioral problems impacted the emotional well-being of these youthful offenders and "60 percent were diagnosed, at one time or another with oppositional defiant disorder or attention deficit disorder (with or without hyperactivity)" (Mullis et al., 2005, p. 143).

Mallet (2010) conducted an exploratory study in a rural community in Ashtabula County, Ohio, identifying the risk factors in youth involved in the juvenile court system. He used a random sample consisting of 91 of the 300 youth being supervised on juvenile court probation. Gathering data from each youth participant's case file in the study, Mallet (2010) found that the delinquent youth were significantly poorer, frequently resided in single-parent homes, and resided with parents who were less educated. In addition, "nearly 40 percent of youth under probation supervision had been identified with a mental health or substance abuse issue" (Mallet, 2010, p. 5). Mallet (2010) also found that 22% of the youths' fathers had reported substance abuse issues. As far as the youths' schooling and education, "twenty five percent of youth were identified in need of special education disability services, with learning disabilities being most prevalent" (Mallet, 2010, p. 6). In addition, "35 percent of all youth were behind one grade in school" (Mallet, 2010, p. 6). He concluded that it is important to identify these youth with these factors early on in attempt to provide intervention and prevention services "knowing there is an increased risk for later juvenile court delinquency adjudication" (Mallet, 2010, p. 7).

Whereas Mallet (2010) and Mullis et al. (2005) examined the environmental factors**,** Neely-Barnes and Whitted (2011) more deeply explored the social, emotional, and behavioral factors of youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems in the southeastern states of the United States. Medical records from an electronic database of 2,575 youth who were provided behavioral services between 2007 and 2009 were reviewed (Neely-Barnes & Whitted, 2011). They concluded, "the mental health needs of youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile systems were astonishingly

high," noting that conduct problems and hyperactivity were examples of the mental health needs of these youth (p. 221). Both Mallet (2010) and Neely-Barnes and Whitted (2011) called for assessment tools to be utilized to detect the mental health needs of youth with a goal that the specific needs of each youth are identified and addressed through appropriate interventions. This research suggests it is beneficial to understand the profile of the youth offender in order to identify the characteristics and factors that have influenced the delinquent behavior and to recognize that these characteristics and factors may also contribute to the youth's difficulties in school both behaviorally and academically. The youth offender exhibiting antisocial behaviors such as poor social control, having mental health issues, or having substance abuse issues may lead to the youth offender's inability to effectively engage in a traditional school environment (Hirschi, 1969), causing the student to be disruptive or exhibit extensive absenteeism (Mullis et al., 2005). Recognizing the behavioral traits that are present in youth offenders is essential so prevention and intervention services may be used to address the behaviors (Loeber, 1990).

Project Based Learning

Project based learning (PBL) is a student-centered learning approach that allows the student to have the freedom, independence, and responsibility for determining what is learned (Lam et al., 2009; Spronken-Smith & Harland, 2009). PBL encourages "students to develop problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills by addressing real issues in a hands-on, learner-centered, decision-making, team-based, student-lead intrinsically motivating environment" (Smith, 2010, p. 180). According to Hernandez-Ramos and De La Paz (2010), with PBL, teachers utilize a pedagogy that promotes a learning

environment in which students actively learn through application and experience to gain a deep understanding of the concept. PBL is a learning approach "believed to be a powerful teaching strategy that can enhance student motivation and promote self-directed learning because the learning issues usually arise from problems that attract the interest of students" (Lam et al., 2009, p. 566). This learning model is one that educational systems are implementing as an alternative school curriculum for youth who have previously struggled academically and who have been disengaged in school (Klein, 2005; Peirpont, 2008; Spronken-Smith & Harland 2009; Tanner, 2012; Wurdinger & Enloe, 2011).

Wurdinger and Enloe (2011) conducted a survey with 42 alumni who attended Avalon, a charter school in St. Paul, Minnesota. Their findings suggested that PBL led these alumni to gain necessary life skills and have an advantage over their peers in college and work (Wurdinger & Enloe, 2011). Wurdinger and Enloe (2011) explained how a student's motivation is an intrinsic factor. They stated:

> In these environments students are not forced to learn by taking tests and having to memorize information. They are free to choose something from their own interest and are evaluated based on the quality of the project and their presentation of the project. Several students mentioned on the survey that they enjoy the freedom that Avalon provides because it has helped them become more self – directed and responsible for their actions. (Wurdinger & Enloe, 2011, p. 92)

Wurdinger and Enloe (2011) concluded that the success of these students not only came from their completion of college and obtaining personal goals but from the values gained through their experiences in a PBL environment. They affirmed that students are prepared for the real-world experiences and are enthusiastic about not only improving personally but about making a difference in the world once they leave a PBL school.

Hernandez-Ramos and De La Paz (2010) conducted a quasi-experimental study with two middle schools in a Northern California school district examining the students' capability to learn history from PBL through technology (School 1) as compared to traditional teaching methods (School 2) through a pre-test and post-test research design. They found that the youth using PBL through technology gained more knowledge than youth taught through traditional teaching methods. According to Hernandez-Ramos and De La Paz (2010), the students learning through PBL enhanced their critical thinking skills in history. Similar to Wurdinger and Enloe (2011), Hernandez-Ramos and De La Paz (2010) reported that the students learning history from PBL through technology believed this type of teaching style helped them learn as well as gain the skills that would help them in future assignments. Hernandez-Ramos and De La Paz (2010) concluded that the students presented with "regular opportunities to work with technology in PBL are more likely to result in sustained improvements in student achievement and lead to an even deeper understanding and appreciation of history" (p. 169).

Lam et al. (2009) conducted a correlation study with 621 students and 126 teachers from four secondary schools in Hong Kong examining the importance of the teacher's role in PBL in motivating students to learn. They examined how a teacher's intrinsic motivation correlated to a student's intrinsic motivation when using PBL. According to Lam et al.'s (2009) findings, a student's natural motivation to learn is influenced by the instructional mechanisms and practices of their teachers. They noted that the role of the teacher in PBL is as a facilitator to support the student in the learning process versus being the knowledge expert (Lam et al., 2009). Lam et al. (2009)

concluded that students will successfully gain more knowledge when their teachers are collaborating with and supporting them through the learning process.

Spronken-Smith and Harland (2009) described the importance of teachers (especially new teachers) having support to implement PBL teaching methods. A case study was conducted with eight teachers transitioning to PBL seeking to explore the impact of a systemic collaboration (Spronken-Smith & Harland, 2009). Spronken-Smith and Harland (2009) believe that for a teacher transitioning to using PBL, a "COP (community of practice) could create a rich learning environment for the social construction of knowledge" (p. 140). The COP provided a forum for teachers to get together to gain professional knowledge as facilitators and to help new teachers who were struggling with PBL teaching strategy (Spronken-Smith & Harland, 2009). Spronken-Smith and Harland (2009) concluded that PBL teaching is characterized by a set of rules to ensure convergence of teaching practice and equality of opportunity for students. Both Lam et al. (2009) and Spronken-Smith and Harland (2009) suggest that the teacher's facilitative approach is essential when applying the PBL method to ensure the student is taking an active role in the learning environment.

An instructor's pedagogy and approach is important when building a supportive relationship between the teacher and student (Klein, 2005). Klein (2005) conducted a case study with five teachers to understand how the professional development of the Big Picture Learning theory supported the implementation. The teachers (called "advisors" in this pedagogy) assist students "to create and enact [a] project that connects to the Learning Goal and broadens a student's core area of interest into larger content or disciplinary knowledge area" (Klein, 2005, pp. 100-101). Klein (2005) defined the

teacher's role in this pedagogy as the individual who coaches or facilitates. Drawing from his interviews, one of the teachers suggested that her role was to figure out the needs of students and then, "working from there . . . and the real world portion is important, making kids feel like their work is not only something they're interested in but is also the real world and is contributing to somebody else" (Klein, 2005, p. 155).

Pierpont (2008) explored the experiences of youth involved in the juvenile justice system in Oregon to understand their engagement through an alternative education program. The Veterinary (Vet) Prep Program was a vocational education program that incorporated both an academic element and a paid training element at an animal clinic (Pierpont, 2008). Ten students and two teachers participated in this small alternative program in which the teachers attempted to use non-lecture pedagogy in the classroom and incorporated a hands-on approach with students working at the animal clinic. Five students were chosen as focal points for this case study. These students were interviewed and followed in the classroom setting for approximately one year (Pierpont, 2008). Although the program ended and was not renewed, Pierpont found that these students had a positive experience in the program that changed their lives (Pierpont, 2008). Pierpont (2008) concluded that the teacher's pedagogy and students' engagement was successful because "the variety in activity, pace, level of participation, allowed students to do something they enjoyed and were good at every day and allowed the teachers to teach through a variety of methods" (pp. 210-211). In addition, the students engaged in activities that mattered to them both in the classroom and in the community, and the trust of their teachers was an important influence.

It is important to know how teachers and instructors engage students and implement PBL in schools; however, it is also essential to explore students' perspectives of their PBL experiences. Riordan (2006) conducted a case study with five students at a small high school on the east coast of the United States to understand the students' "learning through internship (LTI)" experience at a Big Picture Learning Model school. Riordan (2006) indicated:

> students' stated supports reveal their need for an LTI experience in which the triangle of students, advisors, and mentors collaborate to create a powerful and cohesive learning process that incorporates rigor, relevance, and relationships. The students cite the importance of personal involvement, time, and interest from both their mentor and advisor. (p. 281)

The students' viewpoints about the importance of the advisor and student unified relationship concurred with Spronken-Smith and Harland's (2009) notion of a teacher creating a unique pedagogy to foster and support a strong relationship between the student and the teacher.

> [The students] express desire for relevant work that connects across their LTI experience and links to school-based academics. And the desire to a degree of rigor that demonstrates the purpose and meaning of their work, that engages them in critical thinking critical thinking, risk taking, and problem solving, and that holds them accountable. (Spronken-Smith & Harland, 2009, p. 281)

The students spoke about wanting to engage in assignments with real and significant responsibility that made them feel inspired by their work (Riordan, 2006). Riordan (2006) concluded that students benefit and gain a sense of ownership and accountability from work-related experiences. His findings were reinforced by Mussman (2012) who suggested that student participants of the project based high school credited their positive learning experience and staying in school to PBL.

Tanner (2012) conducted a case study with 12 participants drawn from administrators, educators, and students at a public vocational high school in Georgia seeking to explore the impact of PBL in vocational education. He found the majority of the respondents

> agreed that PBL promoted decision making skills and knowledge scaffolding, opportunity for collaboration, real-world connections, opportunities for transfer of knowledge, self-reflecting, opportunity for knowledge attainment for the transfer of knowledge, self-learning, opportunity for knowledge attainment and assimilation, lifelong learning, preparation for future careers critical thinking skills and problem solving skills, creativity and innovation, and amend for closing the gap for success in the workforce. (Tanner, 2012, p. 130)

Tanner (2012) concluded that PBL activities provide students an opportunity to gain competencies in the areas of communication, collaboration, and critical thinking skills through hands-on learning experience that they will be able to take with them beyond the classroom setting and apply in the real world. He suggested that students can successfully be prepared to apply skills and knowledge as a 21st-century worker by participating in a PBL vocational setting.

The research on PBL suggests this learning strategy provides a positive learning experience for students (Pierpont, 2008; Tanner, 2012). The role of teachers as facilitators in PBL supports the students in this learning setting, which cultivates more engagement in activities in which students successfully gain more knowledge (Hernandez-Ramos & De La Paz, 2010; Lam et al., 2009; Spronken-Smith & Harland, 2009; Wurdinger & Enloe, 2011). The students' interest, coupled with their hands-on activities, motivates and encourages them to have a participatory role in their curriculum, one the students can apply outside the classroom environment to the real world (Klein, 2005; Tanner, 2012; Wurdinger & Enloe, 2011).

Interagency and Multisystem Collaboration

Collaboration and sharing of information among multiple systems is essential for providing services to youth involved in various systems. Mallet (2010) noted:

> coordination between and among youth-serving systems has been a growing national policy concern because of the many children and youth who access numerous systems over time (and concurrently) and the large number of youth with multiple disabilities and juvenile court related difficulties. (p. 7)

Mullis et al. (2005) suggested that interagency collaboration and coordination of services is necessary and required for intervention to be successful with youth who are high risk. Sharing information among multiple systems appears to be imperative for youths and their families to benefit from the collective effort of all professionals working together (McCarter, Haber, & Kazemi, 2010). When professionals working with youth are divided in their viewpoints, the delivery of service is not optimal, as the overall goals and objectives of providing service to the youth offender within the juvenile justice system become muddled (Hinton et al., 2007).

Johnson, Zorn, Brian Kai, LaMontagne, and Johnson (2003) conducted a study examining the factors that impact successful interagency collaboration from the perspectives of the stakeholders from nine state departments and three private social services agencies in Ohio. Thirty-three individuals were interviewed and asked about the successes and challenges of collaboration. They identified seven factors essential to the success of interagency collaboration: (a) commitment, (b) communication, (c) strong leadership from key decision makers, (d) understanding the culture of collaborating agencies, (e) engaging in serious preplanning, (f) providing adequate resources for collaboration, and (g) minimizing turf issues. The seven factors are grouped into three

main categories: “a) commitment, b) communication, and c) strong leadership” (Johnson et al., 2003, p. 201). Johnson et al. found that interagency collaboration improves as agencies learn to understand the roles of one another and work together in partnership, and they concluded that linking the specialization of each agency together will likely assist with improving the inefficiencies in the current system of service.

Sharp’s (2006) exploration of the collaboration between mental health practitioners and criminal justice professionals in the state of Florida corroborates Johnson et al.’s (2004) research about the importance of interagency collaboration due to two disciplines joining together. Sharp (2006) administered a survey to 222 respondents from four Florida Criminal Justice Agencies: (a) The Sheriff’s Offices, (b) Municipal Police Departments, (c) State’s Attorney’s Offices, and (d) Probation Offices. Sharp (2006) found the key benefits of criminal justice professionals partnering with mental health practitioners when supervising the mentally ill were improvements in public safety and a decrease in the criminal activity and incarceration among the mentally ill.

Alarid, Sims, and Ruiz (2011) explored the police and probation partnership relationship and collaboration with other social agencies. The researchers conducted 28 face-to-face interviews with various service workers in a county in Pennsylvania. Two themes that emerged from their analysis of the interviews were (a) mutual commitment towards common goals and (b) information sharing for collaboration to occur among inter-agencies. Their findings suggest that to improve service delivery, each individual must be willing to partner with each agency to expand and broaden their traditional role. Similarly, Mears et al. (2010) conducted a national survey of practitioners and service providers concluding that collaboration should be encouraged among professionals in the

juvenile justice multi-system to build a vision of common goals and objectives. They suggest that collaboration among the agencies will improve greater access to information and build a stronger collaborative network (Mears et al., 2010).

Hellriegel and Yates (1999) conducted a case study examining the processes, procedures, and the personal experiences of the personnel involved in various service agencies. The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between an educational and a human service agency providing service to youth offenders. The participants in the study were 12 school district personnel and 10 correctional facility personnel. One finding from the study related to the lack of knowledge across agencies and the limited understanding of the mission and goals of each agency. Hellriegel and Yates (1999) concluded that to increase the levels of trust between inter-agencies more collaboration and communication needs to be practiced. The authors suggested it is essential that the public school and the juvenile justice systems work together to meet the needs and be effective in the services they provide to the youth offender (Hellriegel & Yates, 1999).

Vaccaro (2008) examined the interagency collaboration of services rendered to children and adolescents identified by the public school as emotionally disturbed and who were in the custody of the Department of Children Services in the state of Tennessee. A multi-agency case study explored the services provided to a sample of three youth. According to Vaccaro's (2008) findings, an informal interagency collaboration was practiced among the stakeholders who shared the responsibility when focusing on the youth needs. A cooperative relationship was established among the stakeholders and they held one another accountable in their joint partnership (Vaccaro, 20098). Vaccaro

(2008) concluded that a more formal coherent system that is all inclusive of coordinated services of all agencies needs to be established and noted, "collaboration among social systems child, family, community and services agencies build on the capacities and strengths of all stakeholders" (p. 94).

Dickerson (2003) examined collaboration among nine agencies working with juvenile offenders in the JETS (Juvenile Enhanced Treatment Service) program in Jefferson County, Kentucky to learn the shared meaning of collaboration among the partnership of services. The partnership of agencies serves youth with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues. A definition for collaboration emerged from the themes of the stakeholders' responses. They described collaboration as the appropriate professionals coming together to the table with an equal opportunity to communicate and share responsibility among the partners present. However, roles of partners need to be more transparent and a designated person or agency should be in charge at the roundtable meetings. Dickerson (2003) stated, "A major factor in building collaborative partnership is for the partners to establish or share common goals" (p. 118).

Dickerson (2003) and Johnson et al. (2003) discussed the importance of having the most appropriate and key decision making professionals at the table when forming a multi-system collaboration network, whereas Vaccaro (2008) and Alarid et al. (2011) discussed the collaborative partnership committing to common goals and having the same objective. A multi-system collaboration must share responsibility of the coordinated services for a joint alliance to be effective and successful (Alarid et al., 2011; Dickerson, 2003; Vasaro, 2009). One common finding among all researchers is the importance of communication among the members of a multi-system collaboration for creating and

influencing an effective and successful service delivery (Alarid et al., 2011; Dickerson, 2003; Hellriegel & Yates, 1999; Hinton, 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Sharp, 2006; Vaccaro, 2008).

Summary

This chapter reviewed three literature streams. The first stream of theory, research, and practice identified the social, learning, and behavioral characteristics of the youth offender population and described how these characteristics make this population resistant to traditional learning methods. The second stream reviewed the theory and research on an alternative learning method, project based learning, and discussed how it engages the student with individualized, real-world experiences. It also suggested PBL offers a necessary motivation to engage students as active learner. In the final literature stream, research on the criticality of multi-system collaboration was reviewed. Research in this area suggests that youth offenders and their families will benefit from a collaborative model of interagency partnership.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

This case study explored how the collaborative efforts of multiple agencies in a PBL environment at a metropolitan high school in California support students who are on juvenile probation. While significant information is available on juveniles being educated in the system, little was known about those on probation who are integrated in their communities. This study focused on the perspectives of collaborative team members from the Unified School District, the County Juvenile Probation Department, County Department of Public Health, and non-profit organizations and agencies from the local community seeking to understand how the multiple systems support probationary youth offenders' engagement with learning. This research sought to answer:

- How do various team members describe the practice and pedagogy in place at a site where youth on probation are court ordered to attend?
- How do the various team members portray their collaborative role in support of the students on probation?
- What successes and challenges identified by the team members relate to the alternative PBL model at the school site?

This chapter presents the research methodology and details the research design and rationale that guided this research study. Specifically, this chapter explains the case study research design; describes the site and population selection; reviews the methodology in detail; and, finally, discusses ethical considerations that helped guide the researcher.

Research Design and Rationale

A case study methodological approach involved the researcher exploring a case or a bounded theory in depth over a period of time and gathering information from multiple sources (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Using a case study approach, information was gathered through close observation in a natural setting (Yin, 2009). By selecting a case study methodology, information was collected about how this project based alternative learning model was implemented to serve the student population of youth on probation. Triangulated data were analyzed drawing from transcriptions of one-on-one interviews, multiple field observations, and a detailed review of artifacts related to the school's mission, strategy, and operations. Triangulation of the three approaches provided tangible information and confirmed subjective perspectives (Yin, 2009).

Site and Population

Population Description

Ten participants drawn from the school administration and teachers, city criminal justice department, and community organizations and agencies designated to work with the youth on probation population at this high school were selected for this study. Participants included the school's principal, the dean of students, four advisors (teachers), the school's probation officer, and three staff from the department of public health and community organizations. Seven of the participants were female and three were male.

Site Description

There were distinctive differences between this metropolitan high school site and other high school sites in the district. The High School was originally established as a court-ordered school to support youth on probation; however, from fall 2010 through fall

2012, the High School transitioned from serving only youth on probation to including general students as well. Beginning fall 2012, the High School was available to any youth in the school district as an alternative option for learning with a PBL model. At the time this research was conducted, approximately 40 total students were enrolled at the school. Students on probation made up approximately half the student population. The size of the school population changed based on each student's circumstances (e.g., detained in detention for a new offense or transferred to a new school).

In fall 2010, the metropolitan high school introduced an alternative learning approach based on a project based model called the BPLM. The BPLM incorporates real-life experiences into a structured curriculum. The uniqueness of their model is that students are not divided into grades and are randomly assigned into cohorts. Each student participates in internship experiences, and then presents what was learned to cohort members, with parents attending.

When the research was conducted, there were three active advisors (Teachers) who each had approximately 12 students in their cohorts (classes). In addition to the advisors, there were three subject-specific teachers including: (a) one math-specific teacher who taught math to all the students, (b) one special education resource teacher who worked specifically with the special education students, and (c) a substance abuse teacher who worked closely with those students lacking credits to graduate from high school with credit recovery.

Three days out of the week, the students attended formal structured instruction in the core curriculum areas of math, social science, and science, which were integrated with literacy support. The other two days were designated for project based learning

through their real-world learning experience (e.g., internships, community service). In addition, the various collaborating agencies and organizations on site provided mental health, behavioral, substance abuse, and academic support for these youth. The collaborative agency members were viewed as co-advisors who worked with the advisors to fully support the students. There was also an assigned probation officer who supervised all the youth on probation assigned to the school. Although most of the City and County District high schools had wellness centers that provided health and educational support to students, the City and County District Schools did not provide such an integrated collaboration among several agencies. This is what made this High School unique.

Site Access

The site's principal provided his full support to conduct this research study with a written consent (see Appendix A), allowing the researcher to have full access to the facility, teachers, and documents pertinent to the school operations. Neither student participation nor student data were part of this study; hence, there was no need for City and County School District Research, Planning and Accountability Department approval to conduct this research study. The Drexel University IRB (Institutional Review Board) committee reviewed this research study assuring it conformed to the federal regulations involving human subjects.

Research Methods

Descriptions of Each Method(s) Used

Interviews. The interviews for this research study were semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

Instrument description. The interview protocol was created as a standard guide and was used in each interview. The guide lists specific questions asked of each interviewee, which were followed up with additional probing questions or comments (Merriam, 2009). The interviews were approximately one hour in length with primary questions identified in the interview protocol format (see Appendix B). Six interviews were held on the school site, two interviews took place at the county's juvenile probation department site, one interview was in the home of one of the participants, and one interview occurred via telephone.

Participant selection. The target participant population included individuals who worked directly with the probation student population at the school. These participants included: the principal, three advisors (teachers), a probation officer, and five staff from the various city departments and community organizations. The participant selection consisted of collaborative staff who were asked and agreed to participate in the research.

Identification and invitation. The participants were identified by their role at the High School. Each participant received an invitation by email, which was followed by a short meeting. The invitation included a written letter (see Appendix C) explaining the purpose of the case study, the approximate one-hour length audio-recorded interview, that participation was voluntary, and that all identities would remain confidential. After the email was sent, the researcher followed up personally with each person to identify those who agreed to participate. With each participant, she reviewed the study's intent, oversaw the consent process, and clarified that involvement was voluntary and that it was the right of each participant to withdraw at any time.

Data collection. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and one was via telephone. They were audio recorded and transcribed. Data were kept on a password-protected computer.

Field notes from observations. A journal was used to document notes from observations during interviews and site visits.

Instrument description. The field notes included visual observations that could not be captured during the interview. The school observations were of the physical school site and locations of interviews and the interactions between the staff and the students at the school site.

Participant selection. The researcher observed the staff and students during passing time and staff who came to the site's counseling office during class time.

Identification and invitation. The researcher arrived anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes prior to the interviews at the school site and observed students and staff interactions and took notes.

Data collection. A research journal was maintained to record field notes from observations and reflections while conducting school site visits.

Artifacts. Artifacts including documents, photos, and posted materials were analyzed.

Instrument description. Artifacts included the mission statement of the school, the strategic plan, informational packets given to students and their parents, newspaper articles, the school's website, photos, and materials posted in the school. Other pertinent material supplemented the information that was obtained from interviews and field observations.

Participant selection. Artifacts that supported responses to the research questions were selected.

Identification and invitation. Some artifacts were identified through Internet searches, documents posted on bulletin boards at the school site, and when interviews were conducted. The principal was asked to share pertinent documents.

Data collection. Artifacts and documents were obtained from the school site, from the school's website, and from interviews with the participants. A camera or smart phone was used to take photographs of artifacts that were relevant to the research and that could not be removed from the school site.

Data Analysis Procedures

A triangulated data collection method, "collecting information using a variety of sources and methods," led to data deriving from interviews, field notes documented from observations, and artifacts. These were organized into separate files (Maxwell, 2005, p. 93). Interviews were transcribed after which each was reviewed by hand and analyzed with notes taken in the margins to form initial codes (Creswell, 2007). All other data (field notes, documents, and artifacts) collected were also coded by hand. When all data had been organized and categorized, a computer software (Dedoose) was used to analyze data across the three sources to identify themes. These themes were then analyzed by a further review to identify findings.

Stages of Data Collection

Table 1

Research Timeline

Activity	**Proposed Date**
Proposal Hearing	April 2013
IRB Certification Drexel University	April – May 2013
Data Collection	May – June 2013
• Conduct Interviews (10 to 12) • Collect Artifacts • Observe Activities at School	
Transcribe/Code Interviews	May – July 2013
Analyze Data	July 2013 – July 2014
Write Chapters 4-5; integrate into full dissertation document	July 2014 – April 2015
Dissertation Defense	May 2015

Ethical Considerations

Approval of the Drexel University IRB committee was obtained prior to conducting any observations, interviews, or collection of artifacts. Acquiring this approval ensured that all ethical procedures and protocols were followed before performing this research with any human subjects. A letter from the High School site principal authorizing that the research could be conducted was presented to the Office of

Human Research to verify site permission. In addition, all participants were advised of the study's purpose and informed that their identity would not be disclosed and that there were no known threats or risks that would jeopardize their employment status from participating in this study. Participants were asked to sign a consent form and advised of their right to choose not to participate or to withdraw from the process at their choice at any time.

Participants' names were not disclosed; they are identified by pseudonyms. Due to the research site being closely connected to the researcher's place of employment, all information gathered and disclosed during the collection of the data was maintained away from the work setting, and no identifying information was shared. All documents, transcriptions, and data were stored on a protected password external drive or a locked file cabinet.

Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings, results, and interpretations drawn from the analysis of the perspectives shared by 10 members of a collaborative team supporting youth on probation in a Big Picture public high school. The purpose of this case study was to explore how collaborative systems in a project based learning school (PBL) address the academic struggles of youth on probation. The research sought to understand how this multi-dimensional system supported these youth.

Participant Overview

A total of 10 participants employed by a range of organizations, including the local school district, county departments, non-profit organizations, and local community agencies, were interviewed. All 10 participants worked at the school site. Table 2 introduces each participant by their pseudonym, defines their employing organization, and lists each participant's tenure at this specific school and with the youth on probation population.

Table 2

Participants' Number of Years at School and Experience with Population

Pseudonym	Agency	Years at School	Years' Experience with this Population
Andrew	Community Agency	8	10 plus
Christina	School	4	5 to 10
Emily	Community Agency	1	N/A
Heather	School	7	10 plus
Jennifer	Community Agency	2	5 to 10
Mark	School	1	10 plus
Michael	School	9	10 plus
Michelle	City	1	10 plus
Sandra	Community Agency	10	10 plus
Tiffany	City	1	5 to 10

Six of the participants had 10+ years of experience working with youth on probation. While the school had been in operation since 2000, it only became a Big Picture High School in the fall of 2010. Five participants had been at the school site before it transitioned to the Big Picture Model, with tenures of 4-10 years. The remaining five joined the team after initial implementation of the Big Picture Model and had been at the site for one to two years at the time interviews were conducted.

Participants included the school principal, the school nurse, a county probation officer, two agency counselors, two community agency therapists, and three school

teachers. Job titles are not specified in Table 2 to assure the confidentiality of the participants. To distinguish school staff from other collaborative members, the organization that employs each participant has been noted.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do team members from a project based learning school (PBL) describe the practice and pedagogy in place to support youth on probation who are court ordered to attend?
2. How do the various team members portray their collaborative role in support of the students on probation?
3. What successes and challenges are identified by the team members related to the alternative learning model of PBL at the school site?

Data from interviews, artifacts, and observations were analyzed with the support of Dedoose, a data analysis software**.** Data were initially reviewed using In Vivo coding to identify words and phrases that were used frequently by the participants in the interviews and in the artifacts provided. These were then categorized into codes. The codes were further reviewed and analyzed by grouping and were condensed into categories. The resulting categories were further analyzed to identify key themes that emerged from the voices of the participants based on their personal experiences. A triangulation incorporating analysis of interview transcripts, artifacts, and researcher observations was used to enhance the validity of the findings.

Findings

Four themes emerged from this analysis: (a) unique learning experience, (b) complications applying BPLM, (c) commonality of staff qualities, and (d) working together as a team. These four themes and their related sub-themes presented as findings are illustrated in Figure 2.

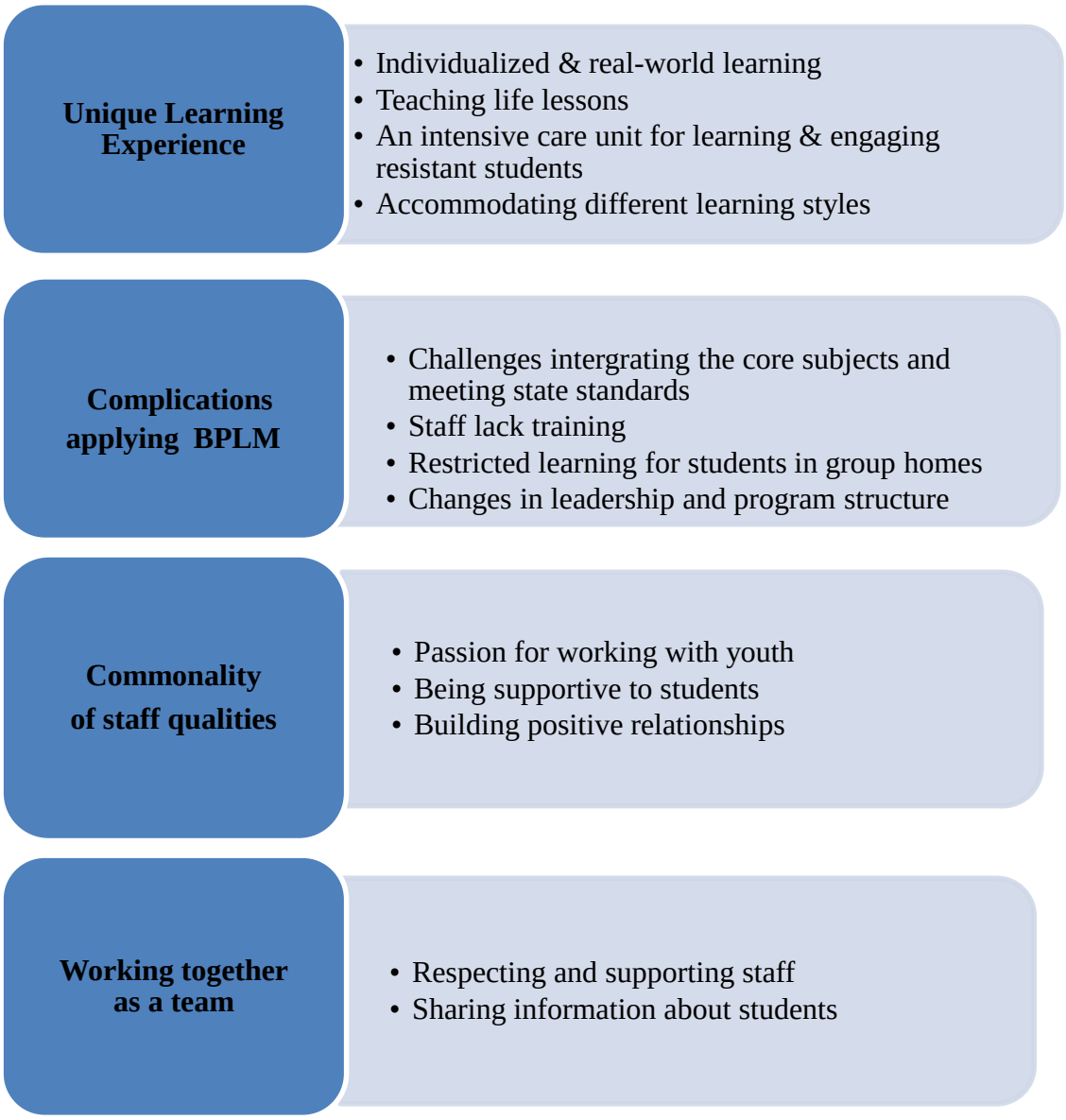

Figure 2. Key themes and subthemes.

Theme One: Unique Learning Experience

The 10 participants shared insights about their experiences supporting the BPLM pedagogy and how the individualized learning experiences presented the students with a

unique learning environment and real-world involvement that positively impacted their learning.

Individualized and real-world learning. The 10 participants described how the BPLM took into consideration students' interests and drew from those interests to create personalized learning projects that were connected with real-world learning experiences. Sandra described that the concept of BPLM "opens up the possibility of many ways to teach kids [by] individualizing each student's learning." She stated:

> Big Picture is really more about what you know, meeting a kid where they are, and teaching one kid at a time; because all of us are different in what we desire and what we want. Every interaction with a student is a teaching moment and an opportunity to learn who [they are], what they want in life, what their passion is and what wakes them up.

Michael indicated, "from the support of the staff members, the students were able to pursue a project they were interested in; you can see more engagement on the part of the student." Jennifer passionately discussed how the BPLM focused on each student's strengths and interests. In addition, students received real-world learning experiences through their internships.

> I really love the fact the Big Picture focuses on the kids strengths, and their interests and real-world learning, and putting them in a community based internship site. I think all of that is great. They learn how to interact with other people, they get some real experience, and I think that's all wonderful. A lot of the times, that's their favorite thing about the school, typically it's their internship experience if they found a good one. It's a great way to build up their self-esteem. (Jennifer)

Jennifer further described how the BPLM pedagogy worked to support the youth holistically. Besides receiving the real-world learning experience through internships, the BPLM took into account the student's academic, behavior, and emotional needs.

> The strength of the collaboration is that it tries to take into consideration the kids academic needs, their emotional needs, their behavioral needs, and it takes into consideration what's going on in the community. It [focused] on the kids' real world, not just real-world learning, but just the real world kids live in every day. (Jennifer)

Andrew described how understanding a youth's interests allowed the teachers to individualize the learning experience by scaffolding the education plan around it.

> The interesting thing about the Big Picture is that they look at what the kid wants to do, and then design their learning around what they really want. Once the kid says whatever they want to do, this is my goal, and this is what I wanna be, then they set up a learning plan around that. In that learning plan, they find out what the kid really wants do and they can scaffold the education around it. (Andrew)

He provided an example of how a student experienced a real-world learning internship working on cars, which eventually turned into permanent employment.

> Even with all of the challenges, there's still kids who excel and leave here to go to college and do good things, get jobs, and are doing fine. One of our kids who's a real problem kid, his internship is now turned into a job. This kid is a super mechanic. He loves cars, his things with cars is just unbelievable. So the guy that who he is an intern, not only is he training him to be a mechanic, but he's teaching him the business that he can actually know how to run the shop or go and set up his own shop, because he's that smart. This kid has really found his mark. Now if he stays with it, there's nothing he can't do within the automotive field. He has that personality. I think he can sell you a car if you already have one. He say, "Oh, you got three cars, you need four." He's that kind [of] kid. He's a great looking kid, has a good personality, and he really understands cars. I mean he knows them upside down and back. This kid is like 17 and the guy is already hiring him to work in his shop cuz he really understands cars.

Heather shared how a student's interest for dogs led to an internship at the SPCA.

> One student just liked dogs, so I set up a fieldtrip to the SPCA and then from that, he had an interaction with somebody that worked there that was kind of in the educational field that worked with students. So we set up an interview with her and that led to her really connecting with him and helped him get in touch with a dog trainer that worked at the SPCA and then set up an internship for him that way. Just based on one interview, he got an internship working with a dog trainer.

In addition to the focus of the BPLM on each student's individual interest and connecting them to internships as part of their real-world learning experience, the curriculum incorporated different subjects allowing for applied learning. Tiffany explained:

> They work with the students to figure out what their interests are; and base or create a curriculum based on what they like and what they're interested in learning more about. They get all their different subjects, math, science, and English and attend an internship program.

Teaching life lessons. In addition to a learning experience that is individualized, Michelle stated, "we're teaching life lessons' here too." Mark described how this method of learning "helps them [youth on probation] to connect those to the greater world, to their family, their neighborhood, their city, their community, their world." Mark further explained:

> It's integrated. You get the kids to think and ponder about things that are of interest or of importance to them and then you get to actually research that. That helps them to think and pursue more deeply.
>
> It's not a school project, it is a school project, but it has to do with them and then they connect it to the world. They have to go out and talk to someone in the world whose involved. The girl who did the project on domestic violence ended up interacting with a local agency that works with victims of domestic violence. So it wasn't just a school project like you did out of a textbook about the civil war or something, it's what's going on now.
>
> Then they present it and talk about it. The exhibitions that they do about the projects are not show and tell. They are actually a sit down and you talk with another group of people about this, and it becomes a group learning experience for everybody there. That's when you really find out that a student has learned deeply about something cuz they can sit and talk about it, and think about it, and answer questions. That's when it's cooking and it's not fake.

An intensive care unit (ICU) for learning and engaging resistant students. Christina indicated that you have to figure out the students' passions to help them re-engage. She shared:

> figuring out their passion, latching onto the passion, and then figuring out how we're gonna build a project. . . . I feel like we're the ICU for the achievement gap. They end up here and a lot of times they're so damaged, we have to rebuild that somehow.
>
> I felt like project based learning really helped with that, because I might not be able to initially sit down with you and grab a literature book, and you be comfortable doing that with me. But if I'm saying that we're gonna use this book to help you research a topic that you pick, then that's something different, but the skills are still the same. You're still gonna have to learn to read that book, you're still gonna have to learn how to write, you're still gonna have to learn how to look up words that you don't understand.
>
> I just felt like it was an awesome tool to reengage a student, and I felt like it prepared them. The skills that they're using, they don't know it, but I felt like with project based learning they're getting skills that maybe I didn't get in high school that would have prepared me more for college.

Sandra discussed how some of the youth's behavior caused many of the students to be resistant. She stated, "Our kids of course had many behavior issues and home issues and they were resistant." Sandra additionally stated, **"**Some of them refuse[d] to do anything." However, part of the BPLM focus was to figure out these students' interest in order to engage them in the learning experience.

Similar to Sandra and Christina, Jennifer also shared about the youth's behavior and emotional needs that have to be addressed first before they can start to benefit from the learning experience. She stated:

> When you work in a school like this, the population has so many emotional and behavioral needs that need to be addressed first. A lot of times the kids can't learn until they've had a certain emotional need taken care of.

Accommodating different learning styles. To encourage more engagement, Heather suggested that no matter what the students' academic or behavioral needs were, BPLM accommodated different learning types regardless of their individual needs. She indicated, "The curriculum I developed helped walk the students through the process of determining what they're interested in." She further explained:

> Project based learning gave them another modality or another way to learn, because there is no one size fits all for learning, if you have special needs or not. Everyone learns differently and we have multiple intelligences, so you have to give everyone the opportunity.

Emily spoke about the value gained in accommodating different learning styles and intelligence. She explained, "The project based learning is hands on and not only [for] different learning styles, but even students with actual learning disabilities, including severe learning disabilities could actually be doing some work in a different way." Michelle noted:

> The Big Picture is for students who maybe need a different way to be engaged in learning. This offers them that. It gives them an opportunity to find some interest in what they might want to do and then sort of go backwards; this is what I wanna do, so this is why I need to go to school, instead of learning everything and then trying to figure it out.

Summary of theme one: A unique learning experience. This theme highlights the unique learning experiences that align from the interests of each individual student. Many of the students' behavioral and emotional needs caused them to be resistant and display a lack of interest in school. The individualized curriculum provided by BPLM accommodated each student's learning style and abilities as well as his or her interests and passion and encouraged engagement from the student. The BPLM model design addressed and supported the needs of this special population as an intensive care unit for learning. The BPLM pedagogy is holistic and incorporates academic, behavioral, and emotional elements to relate to the needs of this youth population. It acknowledges their real-life community experiences. One participant suggested that engagement was enhanced when the learning experiences were individualized. Another spoke about the depth of learning experienced by these students.

Theme Two: Complications Applying the BPLM

While the teaching pedagogy seemed a good fit for this special needs population, a second finding emerged from the data based on the challenges faced in applying BPLM at the school site. Six of the 10 participants described how applying and implementing the BPLM remained a challenge during the three years the program had been in place.

> Unfortunately, they didn't have a lot of teachers that were trained in the Big Picture model. I don't know that it was implemented that well at the school. I think in some cases, when kids aren't functioning really well in the classroom, it was like, "send them out on the internship more." But I don't think it was necessarily for the real-world experience. It was just like, "class isn't working, so let's get them outta here and let's get them to their internship, they're happy there."
>
> I kinda' wonder, if academics have suffered a little bit in order to do the real life learning. I don't think that's Big Picture. I just think that there were some struggles in applying it in the school. I think it was a little trouble in the implementation from what I've seen. (Jennifer)

This section outlines challenges encountered with: (a) integrating the core subjects and meeting state standards, (b) lack of staff training, and (c) changes in leadership and program structure.

Integrating the core subjects and meeting state standards. All three of the teacher participants found it difficult to integrate core subjects into BPLM. Michael explained:

> It was hard to infuse math into project based learning . . . working on projects and coursework both the staff and the students were kind of learning as we went on how to do this, how to set up internships and things like that.

Christina, another teacher, described the difficulty of meeting the state content standards and incorporating them into projects under the BPLM design. She stated:

> The challenges are as a teacher knowing that there are certain standards that need to be met, that they're gonna need, and how are you gonna incorporate that into the project? You are doing a lot more than an average teacher at a comprehensive

> high school that's just for sure. It's a lot more work; it's a lot more uh. . . . Let's say a kid has a topic, and you have to be able to convince that child that you need to do this; also, in addition, so that this is a good project, but in my mind knowing that also this is gonna meet certain standards, this is gonna uh . . . you need this to graduate. You know what I mean? So, that's the incorporating, I guess. Like you know, content standards, California content standards, things like that. So that can get difficult at times but it's like a, it's like a double edge sword.

Similar to Michael and Christina, Mark noted, "With our model, it's a challenge for, let's say, an advisor of 15 kids to be handling 15 different projects." Mark believed the BPLM could be implemented and could work, "if you have the scaffolding there, so you know the kids are moving through, and you're keeping track of what they're doing, and you could get some help, it can be very powerful."

Restricted learning for students in group homes. Heather described how it was a challenge for youth in the group homes to have the full BPLM experience with internships that were set-up off campus.

> Ultimately that was a big challenge for the kids in the group home, that they didn't have the same experience that the other kids did, so we had to bring in internships at the school, but that was very limited, and it's not based on the students true interest, so that didn't work for them.

In addition, she described how the youth from the group homes were not allowed to use the Internet, which also presented a challenge.

> There [are] things that they're allowed to do and not allowed to do in the group home. Like, the girls or the boys at [specific homes] are not allowed to use the Internet for their research. They're also not allowed to not be supervised, so if there were a need to do an interview or have an internship, they're not allowed to do that. So their ability to experience the real world they don't get.

Participants indicated that implementing BPLM was complicated. One participant explained how it was difficult to integrate core subjects to meet state content standards. Teachers who were responsible for overseeing different projects described

how challenging it was to apply and implement this model with group home students who, based on their living situation, were neither allowed to use the Internet nor participate in off-campus internships.

Staff lack training. Seven of the 10 participants spoke about the lack of training for BPLM. It appeared that training emerged from on-the-job experiences while working at the school site.

> In the last year, No one was trained on it. The year before in 2010, Mr. [U], Ms. [V], went to the Big Picture training with [W, X] and myself. Last year, I believe [Michael] went, but we also had [Heather] and [Y]. I also think, on top of that, they needed to come back like Mr. [U] did and then immerse us all in the Big Picture structure and that didn't happen. Like we have [Z], who didn't have a clue. He, at the end of the year, was saying that he understands now "I kinda get what Big Picture is all about." (Sandra)

Sandra was the only participant who indicated that she participated in formal training that prepared her specifically to work with the BPLM pedagogy.

Michael described training that was informal and learned through reading and observing. Michael noted, "I did read the book and the technical literature that was provided to me, but other than that, I personally had observed a Big Picture High school in [City X], I really had no knowledge of this educational philosophy." Tiffany stated, "I don't think that I've received a lot of training . . . how to deal with difficult people, but that's in general. I don't think I've received any training while being at the school." Michelle described how little she knew when joining the school:

> When I came in, I really wasn't sure exactly, what… [Staff A] and [Staff B] did. I kinda know what the wellness team does, but I did not really know what the Big Picture was. I didn't get any training in it at all. I kinda just [learned about it] over time.

Christina indicated that she had no training before she started working at the school site and described how she received much of her training on the job from her personal experiences and learning from her fellow peers.

> I didn't have any training before I got here, but all my training was on the job. I remember I took my first couple of days and I didn't do much but just look, and listen, and observe, and just made sure I really observed everybody, especially the people who were affected.
>
> I knew I wanted to be a teacher, but I actually found out I wanted to teach by working at [X School]. This is natural. This is what I'm supposed to be doing. But my training was not only observing the teachers who were awesome, but also observing what the counselors did, counselors who were really good.
>
> Observing what they did and really picking the two elder statesmen, and picking, I picked their brains all the time, and I picked the other teachers brains all the time. That was my training, just doing it. If it worked one day, it worked; if it didn't, don't do that again.

Similarly, Mark explained, "it was more year-after-year working with a small group of kids in this school and really learning what worked and what didn't."

Jennifer suggested that the lack of training with the BPLM pedagogy was because there were so many changes at the school happening quickly.

> Well, I don't think, I don't even know that it's necessarily anyone here fault. I think these teachers were trained in a certain way of learning, and then I think at some point last year they were all of a sudden brought into this Big Picture model. [I] think it was kind of pushed on them without a whole lot of training and then it kind of continued this year. But again, it was kind of with the change in the schools, the change in principals, and the change in everything and it's just everything's been very sudden.
>
> Everything just has been happening really fast for the school. So I think there's just been lots of changes and I think with all those changes, it's been hard to focus on some of the details, like really learning and understanding how to teach a program like this. I think that the message behind it is a good one, and I think what it's trying to do is great, but I think there needs to be more training.

More than half the participants described not having any formal training with the BPLM pedagogy at the school site. Training differed for each participant. Much of it was informal and appeared to be dependent on individual learning through reflection on

personal experiences or through guidance and conversations with other seasoned staff members. Mark explained:

> Most of the training came [from] other people who worked before me with kids." Four of the participants specifically described the lack of training for working with the BPLM pedagogy, and acknowledged that more training needed to be provided to the staff.

Changes in leadership and program structure. Seven of the participants (70%) shared stories about how the constant changes in leadership and program structure impacted the school, teachers, and students.

New leaders every year. The frequency of changes was constant over a three-year period.

> In three years, there have been three different principals, there's been two new schools, there's been like so many changes, so it's really hard to say how much of that is the collaboration or how much of that is just [the school]. When you're starting from scratch every year, it's just hard, it's really hard. Because there [have] been so many changes, I think there was a lot of questions about what kind of population the school was going to serve at the beginning of every year.
>
> I don't know, I'm not involved in all the meetings that go [on]. I'm not part of the school district and I'm not part of all of these meetings. So it seems like every year, kinda like, last year, we weren't really taking any new kids because we didn't know what the model this year was gonna look like. I think the politics of everything has been kind of hard, and I think it's been really stressful for the staff here, because you don't really know if you're coming or going, or what's gonna happen next year, or if there's gonna be a school next year, or who's in charge. It been [this way] since I've been here. There [have] just been a lot of changes and I think that makes it hard for anybody. (Jennifer)

Michelle suggested that a program like this needed to be planned and executed consistently over a five-year period for it to succeed.

> I know this program has evolved over the years too, and that this was the third year of the Big Picture, but it was always changing. The structure changed within it . . . so it's like even that consistency changed, so how, I think for it to be successful, it would need to say, we're going to have this structure, these people, and this consistency, for X amount of years, and not keep . . . I think that's what I heard from my colleagues, was that, that it was like starting over every year. New

> principal . . . okay, let's just start over again, so if we were to ever do this in sort of a long term way, I think you have to, look at it as a business, it's a five year model.

Removing behavioral counselors from the classroom. Michael described how the District's decision to remove behavioral counselors from the classroom in its third year was detrimental to the classroom setting and a significant change.

> The [City Unified School District] staff decided that they were going to no longer fund counselors in the classroom, which had been the method and philosophy used with our school since I was first employed there in the 2004 year. So counselors were removed from our classrooms in the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, and it was a disaster within our school.

Christina concurred with Michael. She described how students at the school needed both the behavioral support (the counselors in the classroom) and the educational program (BPLM).

> This is the first year without the counselors, and they were sorely missed. That was a huge part of the collaboration and because the kids that we are working with, they needed both. They needed that behavioral piece and they needed that educational piece.

Changing structure, population and expectations. Emily noted:

> I think frankly, this school, this was a very difficult school year; and there was a very strong lack of structure, and that sort of what ADHD or traumatized brain needs is a lot of structure and that didn't exist.

Jennifer similarly described how the structure and expectations changed from the second school year to the third school year.

> I think one thing that's been sort of a challenge, last year there was a lot more structure, as far as, there were a lot more rules and a lot more structure for the entire population. Whereas everybody got wanded to make sure that there weren't any weapons. Nobody could have cell phones, nobody could have purses, so you know there were a lot of things like that and these just weren't an issue last year.
>
> I think this year, again, new principal, new everything. I think that the hope was, you don't want these kids to feel like criminals, you want them to feel

> like normal students and a lot of that kind of went away. But then you've got kids who are in group homes, you got kids that are on probation, you got a couple of kids that aren't, so it ends up being different rules and expectations.

Heather believed that in the third year the school may have been used as an intervention site for youth who did not pass the eighth grade. These were non-probation students.

> This year the program was used as an intervention for those kids. I think, in my opinion. We took on eighth graders. They took some kids that weren't promoted, so instead of having to do another year of eighth grade, they came to our school and they didn't do very well. The majority of them sunk. Their needs were too great and they weren't on probation.

Christina also spoke to this:

> Most of the kids that we've gotten this year that I know of have been seriously truant [and] things like that or just really just had a horrible time in a regular high school. So I can't say your average comprehensive high school kid has come here, not really. It's still traditionally for the kids who are "at risk." I know that was the vision, but that would've taken a lot of time, and that is the aspect of it that I just didn't think was gonna work, not the project based, cuz I saw that work, but that mix.
>
> My biggest concern was that especially when we moved to this building and then it got proposed that we were gonna mix the crowd, I just felt like, (I hate saying I'm kinda right,) I felt the kids who needed to be served were not gonna end up getting served any more, and I remember saying that in a meeting, I feel like they're gonna get lost in the shuffle. The kids that this school was originally meant to serve, were gonna somehow end up not getting served any more, phased out. That was my biggest concern.

Tiffany believed the younger students admitted into the school were "too young" and "not mature enough." She shared:

> I don't think a 14-year-old who is coming to this school and is getting into a Project Based School should be going to that kind of a school, because they're too young [and] an internship is a big responsibility and it takes responsibility.

Many of the challenges presented appeared to emerge from ongoing changes in leadership and a lack of consistent structure at the school site. Removing behavioral counselors from in the classrooms and allowing younger students who were not promoted

from the eighth grade to enter the ninth grade were structural changes the participants presented as hurdles to the school's design and intent.

Summary of theme two: complications applying BPLM. In theme two, three sub-themes emerged. The complications included the struggle to integrate core subjects to meet state content standards and the principles and pedagogy of BPLM. The second sub-theme drew attention to the lack of training the participants received with the BPLM pedagogy. Only a few personnel received formal training in BPLM pedagogy with most getting informal on-the-job training through personal experience and dialogue with more seasoned colleagues. Finally, the last sub-theme that emerged discussed the barriers to success due to changes in both leadership and program structure at the school site. The annual change of principals, the removal of behavioral counselors from the classrooms, and the admittance of younger students with academic limitations brought on a new set of challenges.

Theme Three: Commonality of Staff Qualities

Theme three emerged from the participants' discussions of the qualities staff brought and believed to be necessary for working with youth on probation at the school site. Three sub-themes make up this finding: (a) a passion for working with youth, (b) being supportive to students, and (c) building positive relationships.

A passion for working with youth. Seven of the 10 participants dialogued about the staff's passion and desire to work with youth on probation, suggesting it requires a special commitment and dedication.

> The people that choose to work with this population, really [want to] help people. That's why they have gotten into it, or fallen into it, or stayed with it. Ultimately, that's the one thread that we all have in common, is that we really want to help the

> students and our group. That help could look different for every kid. They're very dedicated and some people have dedicated their professional careers to working with this population because of the depth of their love for those kids, for our kids. (Heather)

Christina shared that she had a strong desire to work with these youth and believed this was her mission in life and she was doing what she was meant to do.

> I just really believe everything happens for a reason, I'm not trying to get all deep, but I feel like God is going to put you where you're supposed to be and my personality and who I am and what I believe, I'm really passionate about helping people who are overlooked, purposely overlooked.

Christina also talked about the passion the staff had, and how a veteran colleague left an impression on her.

> They are awesome. I think in a nutshell, I think that everybody is passionate. Like I said before, I think that everybody is here because they want to be here. It's something in them for the most part, feels as if they need to be here to try to help these kids see their own potential. At the end of the day, it's about the kids [and helping] these kids see what we already see. I think one of my coworkers, the elder statesman, he [said] one of the goals originally for the school was "love the kids until they learn how to love themselves" that's the goal here, that's where it really starts.

Christina denoted that the people who are

> working here are here by choice. They're here because they want to work with these kids. They have a lot of passion about what they do and without having passion, and without genuinely wanting [and] feeling the need to really help these kids, not coddle or slap on the wrist, but really help these kids, it takes a lot of heart, and a lot of hard work, but it is very rewarding.

Sandra concurred with Christina in describing the staff's strong desire and passion for the youth at the school. She shared, "everyone's really awesome, and well intentioned, really kind, and cares so much about these kids, it's amazing!"

Tiffany spoke about what attracted her to working with youth on probation.

> I started my career at Juvenile Hall, and it was a good experience. I also worked with a non-profit, working with the same type of population of kids. I've always

> liked it. It can be challenging at times, but I do, I do like working with kids and just seeing kids grow.

Michelle also described her desire to work with youth and wanting to play an important role in their lives.

> I'm very interested in working and trying to make a difference with students that are at higher risk and seeing what their barriers are, what keeps them from moving forward, and how can I help to meet that.

Andrew shared how he fell into working with youth by accident, but fell in love with what he was doing once he started working with them. He stated:

> I would like to give you some really, you know, stories about how I love children and all of that, but it was almost like accidental. . . . I became a Case Manager, and what happened I realized that I just had this knack for kids, I've worked with kids in the past but never in this capacity where you work with serious behavioral issues, kids who are suicidal, kids who come from all kinds of abuse, I mean horrible situations and have to help them navigate through life and try to get, help direct their course. So, I fell in love with the work.

Mark talked about the dedication and commitment one has to have to work with the youth at the school.

> What I'd like you to understand is the depth to which people commit themselves to the kids (pause), in a personally bounded way. Does that make sense? That it's more a commitment it's more of a mission driven kind of commitment than a job. I think there is something special about people who do this work, and from whom that really gets it. . . . It is a mission-driven commitment, it's not for everybody.

Heather concurred with Mark, sharing, "I want you to understand that the work that I do, although it might be extremely challenging and difficult, I wouldn't change it."

Participants expressed how passionate they were about working with youth. Some words used by the participants to describe their passion for working with youth were: commitment, dedicated, and passionate. Some key phrases that speak to the passion these participants shared are: care so much about the kids; I fell in love with the

work; trying to make a difference with students; it's about the kids and; mission-driven commitment. These phrases reference the desire and commitment the staff has for working with youth at risk. Heather stated, "The people that choose to work with this population, really [want to] help people." These staff were driven and committed to making a difference in these youths' lives.

Supportive role to students. On a handout provided by the school's principal, the school's purpose was to "provide behavioral counseling and academic support to youth on probation." Seven of the participants identified their role and responsibility as staff at the school site to be supportive to the student. Christina shared:

> For me personally, I pride myself on being able to have both pieces. I pride myself on being able to support them academically, school wise, but also being able to support them behaviorally. I feel like in order to work with this population, you have to have both pieces and be okay with that. I just really feel like that's how I support them. I support my kids. Kids will come in here because they know they're about to have a blowout or they know they need to calm down and figure out ok they are going to right the wrong they just did or they know they can come in here cuz it's quiet and [they] can work. So, [for] me, my support has been twofold; the academics and the behavioral piece.

Sandra described her role as being a solid rock for the youth. She stated:

> I see myself as a, I try to be like a solid rock to a kid. I try to be that person that's always gonna tell you the truth, I'm always gonna help you, I'm gonna tell you what I think that can help you, I'm gonna take the time with you, I'm gonna listen to you, and I'm gonna speak to you. So my role was more like to help to keep them engaged, so to keep them, keep their behavior modified in a way that they can be in the classroom.

Michael described his role in support of the student not just as their teacher but as their life coach.

> My role was to coach them as best as I could in life skills, as well as teaching. And that to me is just not part of a regular teacher's job in the school district. It's a role I have to tell you I'm going to miss.

Tiffany shared that the way she supported the youth was by encouraging them to stay in school.

> Just to be in class, the days that they are in school [she tells them to] get to class, try and learn whatever you can, I mean constantly counseling them about trying to learn stuff . . . so it's hard. The best way I can support them is just telling them, "Hey get your education."

Michelle similarly spoke about how she supported one student by encouraging him to attend school.

> I think one of my successes with the attendance thing is that one student wasn't coming at all and [he was referred to the School District's Attendance Review Board]. He's really smart, he scores very high, and he found it very challenging for him to be within the classrooms with the students because of the disruptions. So they developed a plan for him to come during morning times, where he reads a lot so he's supposed to do annotations on the books that he reads and since the [School's District Attendance Review Board], he started attending again.

Andrew also supported students by helping them with their projects. He shared, "whenever there's a project there's a bunch of kids I literally have to help do their projects because I have a relationship with them and I'm able to help them get their work done."

Mark and Jennifer described the importance of helping these youth develop sound decision-making skills. Jennifer stated, "I think a lot of what we're doing is trying to help them find some balance within themselves, within their lives, which is a pretty tall order with these kids." Mark added, "Your goal is really to help them find out what is important to them, help them make decisions about life, understand the world that they're going to be moving into, from their position in life."

Mark talked specifically about the Student Support Team, an intervention team that was created to help youth when problems arise at the school site.

> There's what used to be called RTI (Response Through Intervention), but here it's called SST or Student Support Team. So, this is one specifically that we meet and talk with the students and they're kind of like a triaged around urgency of support needed whether it's one hand cognitive and academic or on the other hand socio emotional. Then interventions, strike the interventions, come back and see if interventions have worked etc., what kind of resources to pull in. On the cognitive end of it, you know we do a diagnostic on all the kids so we know what, what they're reading and numeracy levels are and how to best focus support there.

The participants viewed their role at the school as being supportive to students both academically and behaviorally. In addition, some participants discussed how they supported the students by helping them make decisions in their daily lives. One participant pointed out that a Student Support Team functions at the school site and provided collaborative intervention support that assisted the student in times of urgency.

Building positive relationships. Establishing positive relationships with the students was an essential element when working with the students at the school site. Seven participants spoke of the importance of building relationships with the youth. As Michelle stated:

> One other thing that is really important is to have time to build relationships with all the students, relationship building so they're comfortable with you and you're comfortable with them. If you just sit in an office and you don't get out there, then you don't get to sort of know the students and they won't, I don't think, they'll come to you if they're not comfortable with you.

Andrew and Sandra both described the three components of the Big Picture Model:

> Relationships, Relevance and then Rigor, first you develop a relationship and you teach them the relevance of, you learn to find what's relevant to them . . . then you can teach them how to be rigorous in learning how to do, how to learn science.

Andrew added:

> One of the things that Big Picture talks about is relationship, relevance and rigor. Most things here are rigor, relevance, and then relationship. But we do it backwards because if you get good relationships with kids, you can show them relevance and education, then they can start to put the rigor into learning. That might have worked in the past rigor first, but now if kids have no relationship with the people they're working with, and [then] they can't even see the relevance.

Other participants spoke about what the relationships offered, what they required upfront, and the impact of those relationships with the students. Sandra stated, "relationships require that you move all of your stuff outta the way and you know, relate to this kid." Christina shared:

> The Big Picture is a lot, it's a lot of work to make it happen. It's a lot of work. You have to have serious relationships with each kid, you do, when you're doing it the right way, it's a lot of work.

Michael added, "you did form more solid bonds with students that you couldn't possibly in a regular school environment." Mark described his efforts to establish family connections when building relationships with the students.

> [We] try to make it a place where the relationship is kind of like a family more driven than institutionally. So that the relationships are human, personal, for everybody . . . not trying to let any kid fall through the cracks and know what's going on with every kid. So when they come in and they had a fight with their mother in the morning or something, you just look at them and know something. We do community circles. Every day begin in each advisory with a community circle.

Jennifer shared that the youth have an opportunity to develop relationships with staff:

> I think everybody here in their own unique roles, bring their own unique personality into that role, and so maybe if the kid isn't responding really well to maybe this person over here, then you know, alright, tag this next person because I'm thinking that they really need this right now. So, I mean, there's a lot of, you know, we shoot for a lot of team work, and you know, I think everybody brings something different to the table, so the kids are typically, I think are able to find what they need when they need it.

The BPLM concept incorporates three important elements—relationship, relevance, and rigor—and suggests that establishing and building a relationship must happen first before relevance and rigor can take place. The participants described the importance of establishing relationships with the students. They acknowledged that it was important to ensure students were as comfortable with the staff as the staff were with the students. They sought to create family-like connections. One participant noted that at the school site, more solid bonds with the students were created than at a regular school setting. According to Jennifer, each student could develop a relationship with staff, because each staff member brought something unique to the school and each student could find what they needed from anyone there.

Summary of theme three: Commonality of qualities. In theme three, three sub-themes emerged: (a) Participants expressed their passion for working with youth. They described how working with youth was both a calling and a mission. (b) The participants viewed their role as a staff member at the school as a calling for them to be supportive to the students academically and behaviorally and help them make decisions in their personal lives. They described how a special Student Support Team provided intervention support and functioned to assist students in times of urgency. (c) The last sub-theme discussed the importance of building relationships with the students. The relationships established assured that students and staff were comfortable with one another and built a strong connection reminiscent of a family. BPLM as a pedagogy focuses on "3Rs"—relationship, relevance, and rigor—noting that a relationship must first take place before you can proceed with learning relevance and rigor. One participant

shared that more solid bonds with the students were established than at a regular school setting.

Theme Four: Working Together as a Team

The final theme emerged from the participants' descriptions of **s**hared experiences as a collaborative team, which incorporated (a) respecting and supporting staff members and (b) the communication that was shared among the staff about the students at the school site.

Respecting and supporting staff. Six participants described how respect and support were the basis for a successful collaboration amongst the staff members. "That we are a team. We did not start the year as a team, but we're finishing as a team with a great deal of mutual self-respect and affection" (Mark). Andrew also spoke about how the staff came together in support of the students.

> The fact that we really talk to each other, and we really work well with each other, and we learn to work well, I mean in the beginning it was rocky. We didn't know each other but it didn't take very long because we saw they were skilled at what they were doing, they saw we were skilled at what we were doing, and so it sort of like just came together, it's a mutual respect and were able to get a lot of it, and we've dealt with some really serious issues this year. You know some of the kids had some terribly traumatic things happen and we were able to come together and help them.

Jennifer described how faculty and staff were willing to learn from each other.

> I think the important thing to know about the collaboration is just that everybody has the best intentions and regardless of what education or what experience you came in with, I've seen a lot of people really wanting to learn from each other about how to better help kids.

Michelle and Michael described the leadership role played by specific team members. Both expressed their gratitude for the support and wisdom received from Sandra and Andrew. Michelle noted:

> There is a level of professionalism, expertise, wisdom, and years of experience here working with this population. Their willingness to share what they knew, teach me (cuz I'm still learning), and to support me in being better at what I do, I got that from everyone too, particularly [Sandra] and [Andrew]. They're very generous and I think that shows in the spirit they bring to the place. It was really a unique thing, a unique group of people to work with, and I'm grateful for the opportunity.

She went on to describe that the strength of the team was in its commitment to share knowledge about the students.

> I think that the collaboration part just comes from all the good communication we have about the students here. The strength of the team in knowing who their student population is, particularly the wellness team is. I got a lot of information and I was included in all of that, so being included in with them as a team member made [me], I felt like I was very effective this year because of that. So the way I see it is for the wellness team to work really well, you have to have everybody. [Everyone] has to put away egos and things and be collaborative, to be the most effective team to help the students the best way, and we had that in this team. You know, we had, we built a really effective collaborative team that I felt was really meeting this challenging group of student's needs, despite what some of the lack of structure and consistency.

Sharing information about students. The importance of sharing information about the students was described by seven participants. Andrew shared:

> Well, the main thing that helps us is that we talk. The communications [is] clear, always open and we talk a lot and meet a lot. We coordinate our work. Like, there's a problem say with one kid, immediately the principal knows about it, and wellness knows about it, and then we start pulling together the parts to make the thing work. Say something happens to a kid, say the kid had a violent incident, well; everybody needs to know to make sure that therapy [happens]. If there are outside services they need, if there's someone they need to go and talk to, do they need to get housing, do they need to get out of that neighborhood, whatever happens, whatever has to happen, everybody knows what's happening. The principal knows what's happening, now the wellness team, along with us, goes into action, finding what's necessary to support that kid. You know, were constantly talking, constantly communicating daily about what's happening with that kid.

Mark further explained how student needs were discussed at weekly meetings.

> As part of the collaboration, it's integrated, so when we do talk about kid's needs, the whole staff talks about it at our weekly meeting. We talk about every kid, his needs, where they're at, where the interventions are, that's collaboration.

Christina described how when one staff was unable to relate to a student, another staff who had a relationship with the student would find out what was going on with the youth and would share that information with the other staff.

> The relationship piece is so so important, because if a kid blows out somewhere else, nine times out of 10, somebody within the collaboration will be able to talk to that kid, find out what's really going on and be able to bring that back to the rest of us. Being able to work with everybody else who has been like for me such a blessing, I feel like I'm gonna be able to take those types of skills wherever I go.

With a somewhat different view of the success of team communication, Sandra and Emily described areas where opportunities for better collaboration existed. Sandra discussed this in light of the students' skills at "splitting" faculty or staff from the rest of the team.

> I think that we need to learn more about communicating with each other, and trust each other, you know the kids are pretty sharp. They really know how to get to the part that they split you from the rest of the staff. So I think that we can learn a lot more around when they're splitting and about being able to ask questions of the students.

Emily suggested that administration and faculty at times offered conflicting messages to the students.

> Another thing that's challenging is not being on the same page as the school administrators. If I tell a kid, "No, No, you're going to class instead of going to your internship," and the principal says, "Ok, you can go home," that's not going to work, that's not. That's what's challenging about it. It's that you're not on the same page, because sometimes the administrators don't want to deal with the behavior.

Summary of theme four: Working together as a team. In theme four, two sub-themes emerged describing the emergence of a strong team. The first sub-theme

represented how the staff respected and supported each other. It was noted that the third school year did not start off this way, but as the staff began working together as a team, respect was gained over the year. The second sub-theme discussed the importance of sharing information about the students. These conversations helped the staff develop a holistic picture of what was going on with the students and how interventions were affecting them.

Summary of Findings

The participants in this study described how the BPLM pedagogy provided a unique real-world learning experience that was individualized based on each student's interests, passion, and academic and behavioral needs. Struggles with implementation of BPLM were described as the challenge to integrate core subjects to meet state standards in projects as well as a lack of staff training in and accurate understanding of the principles and pedagogy of BPLM.

Participants noted they chose to work with this student population (youth on probation) because of a calling, noting it requires commitment, dedication, passion, and a desire to truly help people. BPLM pedagogy focuses on the 3Rs—relationship, relevance, and rigor—noting that a relationship must be established first before you can proceed with learning relevance and rigor. Their role at the school required them to support students academically and behaviorally and, at times, with urgency. Some participants spoke about the importance of establishing relationships with the students in order to build a strong connection reminiscent of a family.

Results and Interpretations

Four results emerged from the findings. The results are discussed and interpreted in light of the existing theory, research, and practice as discussed in Chapter 2.

Result One: Individualized learning plans are based on the students' needs and are essential to encourage student engagement.

Data in the current study describe how student needs must be considered along with students' interests when designing and scaffolding individualized projects. It is the emphasis on understanding the whole person (emotional, behavioral, and academic) in the context of their learning that defined significant value in the BPLM. In their research, Mallet (2010) and Neely-Barnes and Whitted (2011) described the importance of identifying and understanding factors that have influenced delinquent behavior and the need to recognize that these factors contribute to difficulty to effectively engage in school. The team's discussion of student needs and the BPLM focus on creating individualized education plans for each student aligns with Loeber's (1990) recommendation to recognize behavioral traits present in youth offenders to utilize prevention and intervention services to address the behaviors.

The BPLM is described as a pedagogy that focuses on a student's strengths and interests and offers myriad learning approaches to engage students. This finding supports prior research by Lam et al. (2009) as well as by Wurdinger and Enloe (2011) who suggested that PBL is an influential learning approach that enhances a student's motivation to learn based on the student's interest. In the current study, it was noted that students' individualized projects are designed by "figuring out their passion, latching onto the passion, and then figuring out how we're gonna build a project" (Christina).

Success stories were told about individualized learning plans that were designed based on the students' interests and connecting those interests to real-world learning experiences. These real-world learning experiences promoted student engagement, resulting in many of them building their self-esteem and gaining skills to prepare them for the world outside the school environment. These plans led to some students excelling in their area of interest and securing internships and being offered full-time employment in the profession. This corroborates with Riordan's (2006) case study in which he concluded that students' desire to engage in assignments with real and significant responsibility allows them to feel inspired by their work and gain a sense of ownership and accountability.

Result Two: Trust is gained between the staff and students when a strong relationship or bond is established.

Data in this study suggest that establishing a strong bond with students is an important part of the faculty and staff's role as staff at the BPLM school site. Additionally, some important elements that must be present for staff to gain the trust of students and to establish a connection with them are commitment, desire, dedication, and the passion to want to genuinely work with probation youth. The goal of these staff is to make a difference in these higher risk youth lives by building a relationship with which the youth is comfortable as much as the staff is. The staff wanted to support these youth and help them improve in their academics and behaviors and overcome the barriers and struggles in their lives. This notion aligns with Hirschi's research, which suggests the stronger the bond the youth have with a positive adult, the less likely the youth would be

involved in delinquent behavior. He stated, "the stronger the attachment, the less likely the child is to be delinquent" (Hirschi, 1969, p. 229)."

Establishing and building a relationship is necessary to gain the students' trust. It is important to strive for a more family-driven atmosphere, rather than one that is institution based, and incorporating the 3Rs—relationship, relevance, and rigor. A relationship must be formed first before progressing to relevance and rigor. This is consistent with Riordan's (2006) finding about the importance of the advisor and student unified relationship that incorporates rigor, relevance, and relationships, which is part of the learning pedagogy. The current discussion about trust and relationships also reinforced Spronken-Smith and Harland's (2009) conclusion that teachers create a unique pedagogy that fosters and supports a strong relationship between the student and the teacher.

The data described how BPML team members successfully supported the students in their learning, projects, school attendance, and behavioral improvement based on the trust-based relationships that were formed. This notion reinforces Lam et al.'s (2009) conclusion that students will successfully gain more knowledge when their teachers are supporting them through the learning process. The trust developed between students and staff provided extra support and fostered their classroom engagement, thus supporting Pierpont's (2008) view that the trust students had with their teachers had an important influence on classroom engagement.

Result Three: Professional development required for staff to ensure knowledge and understanding of instructional methods with the aim to afford all students an enriching BPLM learning experience.

Over the three years of BPLM, data suggested there was a lack of faculty and staff training with most learning happening informally through personal reflection, conversations with seasoned staff members, reading literature about the BPLM, and observing other staff. Spronken-Smith and Harland (2009) previously described the importance of teachers having support in how to implement PBL to assure that it is a way to gain professional development and knowledge about the PBL pedagogy. Although staff had support from their peers and were able to gain knowledge about the BPLM through daily interactions, most did not receive formal training with the BPLM pedagogy.

The data reflected that BPLM can be a powerful learning tool if implemented effectively by the teachers and scaffolding is executed. This is consistent with Tanner's (2012) conclusion of how scaffolding PBL provided students an opportunity to gain knowledge through their learning experience that they could take with them beyond the classroom. Lam et al. (2009) noted that a student's natural motivation to learn is influenced by the instructional mechanisms and practices of their teachers. The data suggest that more training opportunities were needed to ensure that all staff members, regardless of their role, understand what BPLM entails. It was problematic when it came to applying and implementing BPLM because many staff did not have a complete understanding of the BPLM pedagogy.

Additionally, the participants noted the difficulty of infusing core subjects such as math, science, and English and the state academic guidelines into BPLM. This finding is

consistent with Klein's (2005) research theory that reinforces the notion of the importance of teachers receiving professional development on the Big Picture Learning theory in order to support implementation.

Result Four: Trust is an essential ingredient for staff to communicate and collaborate about the students' needs and provide effective interventions for youth.

Dickerson (2003) suggested that establishing common goals shared among a collaborative working group is necessary in building a partnership. One common goal of the collaborative staff members at the school site is their desire and passion to work with the youth and wanting to make a difference in their lives by supporting them both academically and behaviorally. The data in this study suggest that communicating openly with other members of the site team was essential. Many study participants believed that the strength of the collaboration came from the commitment of the staff to share any knowledge they had about the students. This reinforces Mullis et al.'s (2005) research that concluded that interagency collaboration and coordination of services is vital for intervention services to be effective with youth who are high risk. There was significant discussion about the importance of sharing information about the students, as it provided an opportunity for staff to effectively intervene with students' understanding of the complexity of their lives and issues and to create intervention and service plans for students who needed extra support.

However, students coming between staff and causing disagreement presented a challenge and sent conflicting messages to the students. When the staff are not on the same page, it allows for a breakdown in communication. This finding is consistent with Hinton et al. (2007) mentioning that when professionals working with youth are divided

on their viewpoints, the delivery of service is not most favorable for the youth and the goals and objectives become obscured and non-transparent.

Johnson et al. (2003) found that interagency collaboration improves as agencies begin to understand the roles of one another and work together in partnership to improve the system service of efficiency. Evidence from this study suggests that the collaborative staff did not start the year off working together collectively; however, by the end of the school year, they were working together cooperatively as a group. The data suggested the team members gained trust, earned respect, gained knowledge, and learned how to improve in the ways they supported and helped the youth by the end of the school year.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study, which detailed the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. Four major results emerged from the research. Four results emerged from the findings: (a) individualized learning plans are based on the students' needs and are essential to encourage student engagement, (b) trust is gained between the staff and students when a strong relationship or bond is established, (c) professional development required for staff to ensure knowledge and understanding of instructional methods with the aim to afford all students an enriching BPLM learning experience, and (d) trust is an essential ingredient for staff to communicate and collaborate about the students' needs to provide effective interventions for youth. The results were described and interpreted within the context of literature presented in Chapter 2. The findings and results inform the conclusions and recommendations offered in the final chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this case study research was to explore how collaborative systems in a project based learning (PBL) school address the academic struggles of youth on probation and to understand the value of collaboration for enhancing the student's learning experience. The research sought to understand how collaborative team members from multiple systems can best support the engagement of juvenile offenders on probation in a project based learning school setting.

The following research questions guided this case study:

1. How do team members from a project based learning school (PBL) describe the practice and pedagogy in place to support youth on probation who are court ordered to attend?
2. How do the various team members portray their collaborative role in support of the students on probation?
3. What successes and challenges are identified by the team members related to the alternative PBL model at the school site?

The 10 participants at the PBL site were employed by a range of organizations including a unified school district, the county juvenile probation department and the county department of public health, non-profit organizations, and local community agencies. Participants in this study specifically included the school's principal, the school's nurse, a probation officer, two agency counselors, two community therapists, and three teachers. Seven of the participants were female and three were male. Five

participants had been at the school site before it transitioned to the BPLM in the fall of 2010, with tenures of 4-10 years. The remaining five joined the team after initial implementation of the BPLM and had been at the site for one to two years at the time interviews were conducted in April 2013. All 10 participated in one-on-one interviews.

Through an in-depth analysis of interviews, observations, and artifacts, four themes emerged: (a) unique learning experience, (b) complications applying BPLM, (c) commonality of staff qualities, and (d) working together as a team. Each theme was described with sub-themes (13 in total). The themes informed the study's findings and these included: (a) individualized learning plans are based on the students' needs and are essential to encourage student engagement, (b) trust is gained between the staff and students when a strong relationship or bond is established, (c) professional development is required for staff to ensure knowledge and understanding of instructional methods with the aim to afford all students an enriching BPLM learning experience, and (d) trust is an essential ingredient for staff to communicate and collaborate about the students' needs to provide effective interventions for youth. The themes emerged from the findings based on the 10 participants' viewpoints and experiences and the relevant literature.

The following conclusions offer a response to the research questions from this study and are supported by the findings and results presented in Chapter 4. Recommendations are suggested for administrators both in the juvenile justice and education systems who are seeking to create a collaborative support mechanism for youth on probation.

Conclusions

The conclusions are presented in the responses to the three guiding research questions that steered this study.

Research Question 1: How do various team members describe the practice and pedagogy in place at a site where youth on probation are court ordered to attend?

The participants in this study described the BPLM as a learning curriculum that takes into account the students' academic, behavior, and emotional needs, and considers the students' personal interests and strengths seeking to accommodate all learning types. Learning projects were created to respond to the individual interests of each student and were connected to real-world learning experiences. By personalizing every student's learning plan, this research suggests this model supports that student needs were met regardless of their academic skill level. The BPLM curriculum incorporated core subjects, such as math, English, and science. Although participants noted it was difficult to implement and apply at times, incorporating core subjects and meeting core requirements was done by scaffolding the individualized learning plans.

The participants described how students' individual interests were taken into account both when creating projects, and when connecting them to internships. This real-world learning experience is an essential part of the BPLM pedagogy. Accommodating a student's interest as part of the learning experience is an expectation of the learning curriculum and the students became more motivated and engaged from this learning opportunity. Students had the opportunity to participate in internships and have hands-on work experience. Some students were taught how to run a business and set up their own businesses from their involvement at their internships.

The BPLM creates countless opportunities for teaching and engaging youth. There were life lessons taught that would help the youth connect to the world at large, including to their family, neighborhood, community, and city. The pedagogy anticipated students would gain life skills and knowledge through their internships that they would be able to use beyond their time at the school.

A conclusion made is that the goal of BPLM is helping youth on probation students recognize their skills and strengths in order to realize their potential by encouraging them to want to set goals and achieve them. Additionally, the internships gave students the opportunity to gain real-world work experiences. Students' individual interests and needs were considered when assigning them to internships. However, no information was provided on whether student engagement was achieved. In addition, with all the support the BPLM pedagogy and practice was designed to accomplish, it was not transparent if the goal was achieved and if student needs were met by this support.

Research Question 2: How do the various team members portray their collaborative role in support of the students on probation?

All participants expressed their passion and desire for wanting to help youth, especially youth on probation at the school site. They saw that their primary role as administrators, faculty, and staff was to provide behavioral and academic support to these students and this was in direct support of the school's published mission.

It was easy for many of the staff to adopt and accept this philosophy because it reflected their individual commitments to working with youth. These participants believed their primary responsibilities, no matter their role or hiring organization, were to: (a) encourage these students to re-engage and attend school regularly, (b) assist them

in completing their assignments, and (c) support them in learning appropriate classroom behavior. These participants were enthused to inspire these students to identify personal interests and strengths for the purposes of reconnecting these students to the value of learning for their present and future lives.

Offering the metaphor of being a "solid rock" for the students, the administrators, faculty, and staff illustrated their recognition of the importance of establishing a positive relationship with them. They noted that to be effective with this population it was essential to take the time to really listen to the youth to understand what was really important to them, and then to help them make decisions to make sense of the frequently challenging situations through which they were navigating. They recognized the potential in each student and wanted to help these students become aware of their value and their abilities. An inference that can made is that these administrators, faculty, and staff who oversaw the daily operation of this school site were committed to making a difference in the lives of youths at higher risk of dropping out of school or getting involved in delinquent behavior. They sought to understand the barriers and obstacles that prevent each student from doing well and then worked to help each student overcome them.

Over the year this research was conducted, the participants described that they had united collectively as a team with a purpose to work together to support and make a difference in these youths' lives. This may have arisen because of external decisions being made about the school's future that strengthened their community. Whatever the reason, at the time this research was conducted, it was apparent that staff brought their individual skills to the collaboration and contributed their areas of expertise to the team.

Egos had been set aside, and a mutual respect and appreciation for what each team member brought in support of student success was acknowledged. The team members were open to learning from one another to better support and help the youth at the school site. They communicated frequently about the progress of each student and discussed specific interventions that were available for each youth.

It can be concluded that the strength of the staff and faculty collaboration arose from their shared familiarity with and commitment to their student population. They prided themselves on being effective with this population because of the strong relationships they built with the students and each other. Because these positive relationships were established, staff shared pertinent information about the students based on their daily interactions during the weekly staff meetings. By sharing their knowledge in this way, they built more effective relationships with the students and were positioned to help them re-engage in learning with the potential for bettering their lives.

Research Questions 3: What successes and challenges are identified by the team members related to the alternative learning model of PBL at the school site?

The strength of the team's collaboration reflected the three R's (Relationship, Relevance, and Rigor) of the BPLM pedagogy. Their success came from the positive relationships established between the staff and the students. There were more solid bonds formed at this school site with the students than would normally be formed in a traditional school setting.

The participants noted that BPLM was designed to provide individualized learning plans to embrace a student's interest and passion, and to connect those interests to real-world learning experiences. Students were more engaged in their projects because

of incorporating their interests. A female student interested in domestic violence was connected to a local agency that provides services to victims of domestic violence and gained knowledge about victims from her real-world interaction at the agency rather than learning about it from a textbook. Another student's interest with animals led to an internship at the SPCA. A male student's interest in cars led to an internship at a mechanics shop. His real-world learning experiences led to entry-level employment after the completion of his internship. These students had the opportunity to participate at an agency or business in which they had an interest and gained skills and knowledge through a real-life experience that supported them for the immediate and longer term.

Challenges at the school site in applying and implementing BPLM were acknowledged. A key issue was the lack of training in BPLM pedagogy for those who joined the school after its start-up year. Since there was no formal training, those who joined the team did not initially grasp or have a complete understanding of the BPLM concept. This was problematic and limited their ability to support the alternative learning curriculum and the classroom model and work effectively with their students. While informal training was gained from colleagues, it can be concluded that some effectiveness was minimized for staff joining in years two and three of the school's operation and this likely limited the model's effectiveness. Additionally, teachers described their challenges to incorporate core subjects and meet the state academic requirements within the design of the BPLM concept. The continuance of this model, with the increasing emphasis on core curriculum, requires further integration to be effective for this special population.

Changes with the leadership and the shifting structure of the program at the school site were also problematic and created inconsistency. A new principal was hired for each of the three years that the program was in operation, behavioral counselors viewed by participants as being essential to support this population were removed from the classroom, and the school also became an intervention site for youth being socially promoted in the third year of existence. These were issues that limited the effectiveness of the program and its ability to achieve student success. It was difficult for teachers to master a curriculum and staff to accommodate classroom changes in the limited time provided. It appeared that while changes were communicated, understanding their rationale and gaining buy-in was not done, leading to misunderstandings and frustrations. It can be surmised that in this situation, effectiveness with students may have been affected.

The changes in leadership and the lack of commitment from the governing organizations led to the closure of the school after its third year of operation as a BPLM school site. This school did not have the opportunity to sustain and be successful with the frequent changes and the lack of consistency. It was difficult for the school to operate because the staff had to constantly modify, adapt, or amend procedurally what they were implementing each year. The staff did not have the chance to measure if what they were doing was effective from one year to the next because it would change with the new leadership each school year.

The intention of the BPLM was to provide individualized learning plans to embrace the student's interest and passion and to connect those interests to real-world learning experiences. Although it is an innovative learning model for attempting to

engage students in school, the staff's lack of understanding and knowledge of the BPLM made it more challenging to motivate and engage these probation youth when the staff did not have a full grasp of the model in order to encourage these students' involvement.

Recommendations

Participants provided rich insight into application of the BPLM, strengths and challenges of collaboration, and ways probation youth were supported at the school. The following recommendations suggest ways to enhance and strengthen the implementation of model pedagogies, outline transparent collaborative expectations, and increase student support. In addition to recommendations for leaders, educators, and policymakers, they are are also offered in support of future research.

Recommendations for Leaders, Educators, and Policymakers

Establish required training for all staff. Most participants did not receive initial training on the BPLM and overwhelmingly spoke to the need for formal training on this specific pedagogy. The lack of knowledge of BPLM pedagogy was a significant limitation because administrators, faculty, and staff hired after the initial year of operation did not have a complete understanding of the learning model. Attending an intensive training on PBLM and the student population before the start of each school year needs to be mandated for all new hires. Providing returning team members with a refresher training periodically will be beneficial as it will allow them to reflect on their activities and actions though the lens of BPLM and to stay updated on any organizational, operational and learning centered changes.

Expectations outlined for collaboration. Although the team did not start the school year on the same page, by the end of the year, all described the success of their collaboration. To support collaboration at the start of each year, confirming the roles of each collaborative agency and defining the function of each team member's position as part of the alliance may eliminate early confusion and misperceptions. Having the team define what is necessary for collaborative success, and then using this as a rubric throughout the year would foster needed collaboration. Transparency of guidelines is believed to be key for a successful collaboration.

Stability in leadership and structure. The frequent changes of school leadership and the structure of the program over its three-year period led to inconsistency and limited the program's success. The staff had to adapt to new leadership ever year and did not know what to expect form one year to the next. For consistency and stability to be achieved, a minimum requirement for a "model school program" needs to be committed to by the District. To foster success, selection of a well-qualified principal and a commitment of an initial five years to personnel and program goals needs to be made to determine a program's effectiveness. Additionally, the guiding principles of the school's plan should be established and expected to be carried consistently across this time period. A formal program evaluation needs to schedule for the fifth year, looking at program effectiveness and reviewing student academic and life success.

Recommendations for Further Studies

Views from the youth on probation. It would be valuable to research further the perspectives of the youth on probation who attended the school site while the school was using the BPLM curriculum. Obtaining their views about their experiences at the school

site and their interactions with the school staff would give additional insight about the support that was offered and their academic experience.

Examining student support at comprehensive and PBL high schools. Interview students who attended a comprehensive high school before being assigned to a school using BPLM to examine which school was experienced as providing the greatest support.

Conduct research on student employment gained after internship. A narrative research study to obtain the perspectives of the students about their knowledge and skills gained from their internships and the curriculum at school that helped prepare them for employment.

Expand the research study to include other PBL schools. This research was limited to one school site and expanding this study to include other high school sites that use PBL may offer a different perspective of the pedagogy as it has been employed at the school sites. Understanding the pedagogy's impact on the same and other youth populations will add to an understanding of the value of PBLM.

Summary

This chapter highlights and echoes the purpose of this case study and the conclusions and recommendations emergent from data provided by the collaborative staff members' regarding how the BPLM supports and encourages engagement among probation students. The key findings suggest that the BPLM provides a unique real-world learning experience and is individualized based on each student's interests, passion, and academic and behavior needs. Challenges were described in implementing

BPLM related to the integration of core subjects, meeting state standards, and a lack of training to assure shared understanding of the principles of BPLM.

The administrators, teachers, and staff responsibilities at the school were to support the students both academically and behaviorally. As members of this collaborative team, they worked together and shared information about all students in an attempt to meet each student's needs and promote academic success. While student academic and behavioral success was not studied in this research, understanding team effectiveness may offer insights into other program-based schools that serve this population of youth on probation.

This case study offers insights into how multiple systems come together and work collectively in collaboration in attempt to support youth on probation in a project based learning environment. Given that this school closed in June 2013, it is hoped this information may support other educator and community response teams working in a cooperative manner to support youth on probation who are struggling both academically and behaviorally in a range of school settings. What is evident from this research is the participants' passion and desire for wanting to work with this high-risk population and their aspiration to make a difference in the lives of these youth. It is their passion, focus, and commitment that may differentiate outcomes for these youth!

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Appendix A: Letter of Permission

February 15, 2013

Drexel University College of
Medicine Office of Regulatory
Research Compliance 1601 Cherry
Street. 3 Parkway Bldg., Mail Stop
10-444
Philadelphia. PA 1902

This letter is to acknowledge that Ms. Stephanie Speech, Drexel University Doctoral Candidate has the permission of the Principals' Center Collaborative Big Picture School's principal, Dr. Charles Plant to conduct research at our school site for her study, "Exploring Collaborative Support Strategies for Youth on Probation in a Project Based Learning School."

It is agreed that Ms. Speech may conduct the following research activities at our school: (1) observe advisors and students in classroom and break times during school hours; (2) attend collaboration team meetings for the purpose of observation; (3) interview on-site school staff members and other collaborative staff based on staff availability, (4) collect any pertinent documents or information about the school and the project based learning model for use in her research. Ms. Speech's on site activities may be conducted between May 1 and June 30. 2013.

Ms. Speech has agreed to not disrupt the school day or be a distraction to the students in the classroom. She has agreed that the name of the school or identifying information of staff will remain confidential and will not be disclosed in her final dissertation. Ms. Speech has also agreed to provide to the school a copy of the Drexel IRB- approved before she recruits participants on the school site, and will share her final research results when completed with the Principals' Center Collaborative staff members.
If there are any questions, please contact my office.

Sincerely.

Charlie Plant. Principal
Principals" Center
Collaborative 1360 43rd
Avenue
(415) 242-2520
cplantOr,metmail.or

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions

Time of Interview:
Date:
Location/Setting:
Interviewer: Stephanie R. Speech
Interviewee:
Position of Interviewee:
Before Interview is conducted:

Thank the Interviewee for taking time out of his or her schedule to be part of your research

Explain the purpose of the study

Inform Interviewee approximate length of interview (1 hour)

Inform Interviewee that interview will be audio recorded

Inform interviewee that confidentiality is important. Neither the school nor district will be named nor will a pseudonym be created to present his comments.

Interview Questions:

Personal Background:

1) What is your job title?
2) How long have you been working at the school site?
3) What attracted you to work with this specific (youth on probation) student population?

Project Based Learning (Big Picture Model):

4) What strategies are used as part of the project based learning model to engage the student in his/her learning experience?
5) What are the strengths of the project based learning that you have observed?
6) What are some challenges of the project based learning that you have observed?
7) How is your job different from before incorporating the project based learning model. (How is it the same?)

Collaborative Team

8) How does your role as a collaborative member support the student?
9) How are roles defined?
10) What support mechanisms are used?
11) What are the strengths of the collaboration?
12) What are the challenges of the collaboration?

Juvenile Offender Population

13) What type of training have you received to work specifically with this population (youth on probation)?
14) What is it about this population of students that makes their educational experience a unique situation?
15) How has this population of students adapted to the project based learning model?
16) What aspects of the collaborative project based learning experience have contributed to your students' success?
17) Describe the differences in population between traditional students and youth on probation at this school. How does this mix of students influence the school setting?

Closing:

18) What do you want me to understand about the work you do, the students you serve, and the people with whom you collaborate?
19) Is there anything else you would like to say or add?

Appendix C: Participant Invitation Letter

March 15, 2013

Dear _____,

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the collaborative support strategies for youth on probation in a project based learning school. The study is being conducted by Stephanie Speech (co-Investigator), Doctoral Candidate, at Drexel University under the supervision of Dr. Kathy Geller, Principal Investigator and dissertation Supervising Professor. Charlie Plant, Principal of PCC has agreed to the site's participation in this research study.

The purpose of this case study is to explore how a main project based learning component engages students and how the interagency collaborative systems support the students who on juvenile probation through the perspectives of the collaborative team members. The goal of this study is to learn how collaborative systems in a project based alternative learning model address the academic struggles of the youth on probation and to explore how the collaboration creates a more positive learning experience.

As a professional staff member working with the juvenile offender student population, your input will assist in an exploratory case study seeking to understand how the project based learning and the collaborative efforts of the professional team affects learning for youth on probation. It is the researcher's goal to systematically draw from your shared insights, observations of team meetings and classrooms, and a review of key documents to create an integrated understanding of project based learning at the Principals' Collaborative Center.

Your agreement to participate in this study is voluntarily. Your participation will involve a recorded interview that will last between 45 minutes to one hour. All information you disclose during the interview will remain confidential and will only be used by the investigator for the purposes this research project. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be included in the study. Recordings and transcriptions will be maintained in a locked file at Drexel University and not shared with others.

If you have any questions prior to you participating in this study, contact the Principal Investigator: Kathy Geller, Ph.D., Drexel University (Sacramento Campus), School of Education, (916) 213- 2790; Kdg39@drexel.edu

If you choose to participate, a signed copy of this letter will be provided to you as your agreement. Following this letter, I will be contacting you to schedule an interview. You may also contact me (information below).

Thank you for your interest in my research project and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Stephanie R. Speech
Co-investigator
Doctoral Candidate
Ed.D in Educational Leadership and Management
Drexel University, School of Education
415-298-5330
Srs337@drexel.edu